ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Inquiry into Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Rosebud—1 March 2004

Members

Mr B. W. Bishop  Mr T. W. Mulder
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Witness

Mr R. Tiffany, Road Safety Officer, Shire of Mornington Peninsula.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome, Robin. We appreciate your time and input and that of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. These are public hearings. We take a transcript and a copy of that transcript will be provided to you in due course. What you say is protected by parliamentary privilege, which means that what you say here today cannot be used against you legally into the future. To kick off, perhaps you could describe to us the geographic area that the Mornington Peninsula shire covers.

Mr TIFFANY — I have a Powerpoint presentation.

Overheads shown.

Mr TIFFANY — I have started by giving you a precis of why a metropolitan council is presenting to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee on the rural road toll. I would like to give you a bit of background on our status in road safety. We came to road safety via a Roadsafe grant in 2000. After extensive consultation and crash statistics analysis we identified the priorities and adopted a road safety strategy in 2002. I was appointed as the road safety officer for the shire in late 2002, basically to coordinate internally and promote externally to our residents road safety programs and coordinate with our community groups and the like about road safety and what the shire believes.

The CHAIR — Did you have a road safety or transport background?

Mr TIFFANY — I am actually a chalkie by trade and came to road safety because there was a job opportunity maintaining bicycles, and as a pushbike nut who used to teach kids I thought that that was my foot in the door, and have had to play road safety science catch-up ever since, I guess. A lot of road safety seems to me to be based on behaviours and attitudes, with a science feel to it as far as the infrastructure goes. We are an interface council like many others in Victoria. You will hear from the City of Casey and various others as well today. We obviously have to match urban demands on our rural roads. We deal with some amazing volumes through our rural road network. We also have high tourism value, so we have great seasonal variations.

Mr EREN — How much of the shire would have gravel roads?

Mr TIFFANY — In terms of percentage — and I have a map that comes up in a another two slides — we have probably only 20 to 30 per cent unsealed roads. I guess the difference for us, as opposed to a rural council, is that councils like Warrnambool, for example, would have long stretches of unsealed roads and most of our unsealed roads would be short links connecting other sealed roads on the road network as such. You will get a better feel for that when I put up a better map of the shire, which comes up in about two slides.

The interesting point on this slide is the 70/30. Council feels very strongly that 70 per cent of the Mornington Peninsula shire is to remain undeveloped and to continue to have this rural feel. That was ticked off in the statewide 2030 planning scheme, I believe, and so, fingers crossed, that will continue. What it does is guarantee us this rural road network, which will continue to have issues.

Bearing in mind that the next slide is of a black spot map for 1994–98, one of the reasons I would like to use it is so that you get a visual feel for the size. If you look around both sides of the bay you will notice it is very much urban. I suppose that supports everybody’s sea changes and people wanting sea views, so we find it is very urbanised. If you look in the middle there are obviously links, with rural road networks linking both sides of the bay, and I guess that is how we classify our rural road network. The interesting part about the map that shows crash statistics for 1994–98 is that quite a few of the red dots, which are the black spot locations, do occur on our rural road network. It is a struggle and a continuous process to have that addressed as such, whether they are on local roads or country roads.

Mr EREN — Are these fatalities?

Mr TIFFANY — No, they are not. They are casualty crashes, which are serious injury, other injury and fatality crashes, so all three levels of crash are swooped into one catch and classified in terms of five casualty crashes in the four-year period.

The CHAIR — I might be jumping the gun a bit with your presentation, but do you have a breakdown of the figures of the causes, like run-off as compared to head-on crashes?

Mr TIFFANY — I certainly do.
Mr BISHOP — Before you get off that, what sort of protocols do you have with Vicroads and the police in relation to those particular areas you have marked off?

Mr TIFFANY — The police operate out of two locations with us here in the traffic management unit sections. They operate out of Hastings, which is, if you like, the bit that sticks our on the right-hand side of the map as you view it, and they operate out of Rosebud, covering the north and the south of the peninsula. We meet with them every two months to discuss issues of enforcement and we talk about concerns with standard of roads and speeding issues that have been either relayed back to us via our customer service request system or through enforcement procedures that they have carried out and noticed a high catchment of offenders. We also talk about issues that I will speak about later — areas that need to be addressed as far as speed limits and continuity of speed limits on road networks go. I guess that is a continual process in trying to address anomalies, as the public see them. We have what we would think would be a fairly good working relationship with them. Vicroads engineers also attend those meetings.

Mr BISHOP — Have they given you those points or have you done that yourself?

Mr TIFFANY — No. This has come off a Crashstats database that Vicroads run. All we have done is basically pull out a map. This actual map was created for our strategy. Really all I have done is use it, I guess, to display the physical locale of the shire itself and its make-up.

Mr BISHOP — They do not necessarily notify you; you have drawn that information down?

Mr TIFFANY — No. Part of that two-monthly meeting that we have is an opportunity to share statistics. They would have a more up-to-date handle on fatality crashes, although with serious injury crashes there is usually a three to six-month delay on the publication of them, depending on the outcome of injuries and hospital cases and such. We certainly share those statistics as often as we can.

What we did in our strategy — and I apologise for the difficulty in reading this graph — is try to discover who was crashing on our roads and where the problem lay. Basically the columns describe our population in age group numbers and the line shows the percentage of our age group involved in road crash activity — for example, in the 18-to-25 age group we have a fairly small population of residents, but they are very much overrepresented in our crash activity, as that graph shows.

Mr EREN — Do you have a breakdown of those people involved in those crashes? Are they locals or visitors?

Mr TIFFANY — We did some survey data work as part of the road safety strategy, to discover the distance from home of people involved in casualty crashes. Basically what we discovered was that the majority of people crashing in the shire unfortunately are shire residents or have a postal address, if you like, less than 5 kilometres from where they were reported as a casualty crash. That led us to believe it was not visitors coming in and increasing our traffic volumes seasonally and crashing; it was perhaps our residents’ inability to deal with the increased volumes as they came in seasonally.

The next graph shows the speed limit accidents on the roads that we have. The blue columns are the Victorian percentage performance and red are the Mornington Peninsula shire’s own performance. From this I guess we can see that our own crash activity is predominantly on our urban road network. The part of the graph that worries us is the 100-kilometre-an-hour speed limit, as shown along the bottom. It shows that on our rural road network in the 100-kilometre-an-hour areas we actually outperform — if you will allow me to use that term — the state, so we provide quite a large of casualty crash accidents on our rural road network.

The CHAIR — You just about double that.

Mr TIFFANY — Yes. So that is certainly an area of concern for us.

Picking up on your question before, I apologise for the difficulty of reading the bottom section of the next graph. Basically it is a breakdown of the types of crashes occurring on the peninsula. The greatest number, as you would expect with an urban interface council, are crashes involving other vehicles. However, the next level down is worrisome for us because we think it is typical of the rural road network crashes. It shows collisions with a fixed object, so collisions with a tree or pole — that sort of crash. That is a crash of concern to us. Picking up on the
previous graph, we have quite an extensive rural road network, and so we think that reflects our rural roads. I guess this is something that we have all seen before and whether or not we believe the Wipe Off 5 campaign, basically small speed increases have an amazing increase on your risk of being involved in a casualty crash. We think it is relevant in terms of again taking us back to our rural road network. Some people have taken umbrage at the science recently and you might have seen articles in the *Age* where people have tried to debunk the science behind increases in speed, but we believe until another study has been replicated that it is best to go with the established science.

Down the bottom we are talking about impact speeds. Basically the higher the speed, the higher the severity of the crash. On the left-hand side is shown your percentage risk of death. You can see that as it heads up to 60 kilometres an hour or 70 kilometres an hour there is very minimal chance of surviving a crash at that speed. The interesting thing about that graph is the new car designs. Monash University Accident Research Centre has produced these figures for us, which are the survivable speeds for impacts, so it is 70 kilometres an hour for a head-odd crash, 50 kilometres an hour for a side impact crash, 30 kilometres an hour to 50 kilometres an hour for an impact with trees or fixed objects, and 30 kilometres an hour for pedestrians. This is the science that helped us as a state to reduce speed limits in various areas offering protection to vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and schoolchildren. Not wanting to teach the committee to suck eggs, but we started with the default speed limit which came out of a parliamentary road safety committee. We are also attacking strip shopping centres statewide and also locally within the shire. There are rural town centres at 50 kilometres an hour which are soon to be 40 kilometres an hour, and 60 kilometres an hour and obviously lower travel speeds in crashes offer greater protection for vulnerable road users.

However, the network that remains untouched from the benefit of speed limit management is the rural road network, typically made up of streets that are winding and narrow, have unsealed shoulders, perhaps they will have regular cross-intersections, are tree-lined with no or minimal clear zones, quite often have table drains, invariably are two lanes leading into a single lane with no clear separation between opposing lanes of travel, predominantly have 100-kilometre-an-hour speed limits and may well be unsealed. From the data we saw before we know that higher speeds increase crash severity. So one of the works that is left undone and is still to do — and the thing that we should bear in mind — is that crashes on rural road networks happen to real people. This was a 15-year-old person who perhaps made a poor choice by being present in the car. This is on Graedons Road, which is one of our rural roads with a 100-kilometre-an-hour speed zone.

If you will allow me to digress for a second I think the most depressing thing about this memorial is not the farewell message, but if you look around the base of the tree it is perhaps the alcohol that is being used to farewell the person. That leads me to other questions about the effectiveness of our anti-drink-drive legislation and maybe it says something about us as a social culture that has not quite got the connection between alcohol and driving and those sorts of things. It always saddens me, but unfortunately it is always there.

**Mr EREN** — So it was an unsealed road?

**Mr TIFFANY** — No, this is a bitumen road. It is what we would call a north-south arterial link. It links the Mornington Peninsula side to the Hastings side. It is predominantly straight, although it has some regular cross-intersections on it. The intersections are well lit. However, it has table drains on both sides and the view is that the car crested the hill, lost control at high speed which sent it across the road. It then came back and hit a table drain and connected with the pole.

**Mr HARKNESS** — Robin, you had a slide up their earlier with vehicles hitting fixed objects. Do you have the breakdown between trees and fixed objects?

**Mr TIFFANY** — No, the Monash University study did not separate fixed objects from trees. We have not actually drilled down far enough to be able to separate fixed objects from trees in our casualties crash information either. It would certainly be an interesting one to look at and, as I continue, that is an issue that we would like to lobby on — that is, tree removal and an increase in clear zones.

**Mr EREN** — What would your view be about speed restrictions on unsealed or gravel roads?

**Mr TIFFANY** — I have a spiel for you on that. We would like to see reductions on unsealed roads and we concur with Warrnambool’s efforts to introduce a statewide default speed limit. However, we would say that it does not go far enough for interface councils. But I have certainly got some lead into that as it goes on.
Mr EREN — How far do you want it to go?

Mr TIFFANY — Fifty kilometres an hour.

Mr EREN — Fifty?

Mr TIFFANY — Yes. We believe a lot of our unsealed road network comprises short links between sealed road opportunities. We think the council runs quite a high dust suppression program. Maintenance on unsealed roads is a nightmare, we are always taking complaints from residents with regard to amenity and various other issues on that unsealed road network. Given that there are a lot of other opportunities to connect to bitumen roads, our belief would be that we would like to discourage high volumes from travelling down our unsealed roads, and we would at least like to have a mechanism whereby you could attach a different speed limit to an unsealed road rather than just capturing them all into the one statewide default. We think that ignores the function of the road, the standard of the maintenance on the road and the description of the locality and the community opportunities for residents on that road as well. So we do not think it goes far enough.

I thought I would bring us back to some of the science. We must always remember that fatalities are real people and are our residents. In its road safety audit guidelines book Austroads documented the crash costs. If we localise them down to Mornington, you will see that in 1999 we had 11 fatalities and 384 injury crashes at a community cost of $47 million, which is a staggering figure in terms of road safety. Some of the benefits and infrastructure changes that we consider are minimal compared to the $47 million that we talk about in community and social cost.

We think one of the things that needs to be addressed is speed limits and we think speed limits need to be used as a speed management tool and not as a way of limiting drivers. The current process is flawed, if you will allow me to say that. It is based on a system that is 50-years old and does not reflect current road user use, volumes and/or our road network. It relies on an 85th percentile speed compared to the current speed limit. Therefore 85 per cent of the population drive down the road at a given speed and that then becomes the speed limit of the road using the same logic compared to the speed limits that are on it. If there are no great differences we accept that and that is the speed limit. It also relies on traffic volumes; it relies on the presence of driveways — so abutting properties — and it is highly attached to the road’s functional classifications. Quite often we are not game to reduce speed limits on arterial roads because we believe mobility is a more important issue. Our belief would be that its needs to be a crash risk-based system such as is currently being proposed internally at Vicroads and that it needs to consider the crash record and numbers of fatalities versus serious injuries on the length of road that is being considered for a speed limit change. You need to consider the presence of black spot or black lengths; whether or not the road has sealed shoulders; whether or not we have clear zones — so, Alistair, that picks up your point about trees and whether or not if it is a tree-lined road why we are sending cars down it at 100 kilometres an hour with no opportunity to re-enter the road or come back onto the seal. The other thing too is that quite often they have regular concealed or offset cross-intersections on them which would make their function as an arterial road very limited because you are not able to send down high traffic volumes and have a wonderful flowing road.

We believe that system would be simple and commonsense and easy for the motorist to understand because basically higher crash risk equals lower speed limit and lower crash risk equals higher speed limit. So for us it would make sense that you enter the Mornington Peninsula shire via a four-lane freeway separated by a median in the middle with clear zones and opportunities for road safety on that road. There are no problems in travelling at 100 kilometres an hour, but it is crazy to expect that you can hop off that road onto a narrow, winding road and still expect to maintain a travel speed of 100 kilometres an hour.

Now I know that internally Vicroads have adopted the philosophy of Vision Zero, but I would suggest that they are limited in being able to deliver that philosophy currently because the guidelines do not allow them to recognise the crash factors and crash risks on a road network and reduce the speed limit accordingly. Their guidelines are staid and rely very much on traffic volumes, mobility issues and those sorts of things — and we think they need to be changed. We think it is the last silver bullet to use speed limits as speed management — if you will pardon my diversion there.

The questions, I guess, are, first: why have speed limits that people cannot survive? We think it is crazy to send cars down roads at 100 kilometres an hour when the survivable crash speed is 70 kilometres an hour. The other issue is: why tolerate unforgiving roadside environments? I guess that if you will allow me to answer that, it is because we
have no choice. Currently under the planning schemes under the 1987 Planning and Environment Act and the native vegetation management plan, we have no choice but to accept unsafe roadides and unsafe roadways.

I will give you an example of such a road where we have had issues in removing trees from the side of the road and constructing the safest possible road we can for our residents. The next slide is a photograph of Bungower Road, which runs between both sides of the bay. Once it was sealed we would consider its function — if you will allow me to use that word — to be quite major arterial. Currently it is unsealed in places and has a 100-km/h speed limit in those locations. As you can see, it is narrow and tree lined, with no or minimal clear zones. Some of the implications for us of sealing this road have been that we have had an amazingly exhaustive planning phase in being able to apply for planning permits to remove trees from this road, we have had to negotiate with residents on the number of trees, go to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and all sorts. We basically requested that 226 trees be removed and it became an amazingly lengthy process and increased costs on the project by about 10 per cent. It has meant that we have actually exceeded the time frame for the Roads to Recovery program and have had to negotiate an extension of the timeframe on that because of the planning process on tree removal and the negotiation with residents on the removal of those trees. It is not the only road, either. Eramosa Road, Red Hill Road and Tuerong Road are roads within the shire where we are currently undertaking the same process. Our view would be that there needs to be a balance in planning.

Some of the suggestions I would like to make it are that we could change the Vicroads guidelines on speed limits and allow us to use speed limits as a management tool. The next one is an interesting one, but I think it is ready important in terms of who would pay for the infrastructure changes in the state. We should legislate for the speed camera revenue to be used in road safety. I think there are a couple of benefits in this. One is that is an immediate argument against the complaint of revenue raising that a lot of our motorists seem to work seem to be making at the moment. If we all believe the revenue figure that was published in the Age in January of this year, $200 million would make an amazing difference to the road infrastructure in the state of Victoria in terms of road safety improvements. Even if that revenue were to reduce because of behaviour changes, and we start with $200 million and work our way down to what it balances out to, it still becomes an effective black spot application or funding process for road safety improvements.

The next one I believe is probably equally important — that is, we need to change the way car manufacturers advertise their cars. In Europe they advertise cars on the basis of road safety and design features. A Renault is sold because it is a six-star road safety vehicle and it is marketed in those terms — the same with Saab and Mercedes-Benz. In fact, I think Mercedes-Benz run a marketing campaign that says, ‘If you drive a Mercedes and crash into another Mercedes, Mercedes guarantees you will live’. Obviously car design and safety features mean a lot to car manufacturers in Europe. It is not about speed, power or the output or kilowatts that the Mercedes car produces; it is about the fact that it will protect you. We think that would be an effective tool in Australia. I think it is crazy that you can expect in Australia to sell a motor car that can do 1 million km/h on a road network that has a speed limit of 110 kilometres an hour.

We think that the current vegetation and planning controls need to be changed so that we do not compromise road safety in terms of the environment. There needs to be a balance, with some equal weighting for the road safety benefits of removing trees from the roads and not just the amenity concerns under the current planning scheme that sees us going to VCAT to fight about removing trees from the sides of roads.

The CHAIR — Given that process for tree removal even on your main established roads where the council perhaps identifies trees as a danger, are there trees still on your main roads that you have identified as dangerous but that through the planning process remain there today?

Mr TIFFANY — Yes. In the Bungower Road example we applied for the removal of 226 trees. Under negotiation the figure of 226 was reached because it would appease the residents’ desires to have a tree-lined street and council’s opportunity to deliver I think it was a 2.5 metre clear zone. Our option A in an ideal process would have been probably to double the tree removal, but because it was a negotiated process and it took ministerial approval to get to the 226 that we arrived at, we were I guess not happy but we were able to compromise and see those trees can remain. But certainly we considered them to be potentially dangerous hazards on our roadside, definitely.

Getting back to the question you asked about interface councils and unsealed roads, as I said before, we think that, for example, a 50-km/h speed limit on a unsealed roads that are short stretches in an interface council would deter
motorists from using them as rat runs and therefore encourage them to undertake their trips on the sealed road network. It would give us another tool, if you like, in being able to deliver the most amenable living conditions we can for our residents in those locations. Quite often they are disadvantaged at the expense of their location, if you like.

The CHAIR — With regard to that issue, what you are saying is that council would support 50-km/h speed limits on unsealed roads, not only from a safety point of view but also to minimise the actual effects?

Mr TIFFANY — Certainly. I think there would be a couple of benefits from it. One would be that if you reduced your traffic volume on that road you certainly would not increase your dust suppression program for that road and you certainly would have spin-off maintenance benefits again because of the discouraging of increased volumes down that road. We face quite large dilemmas for on Moorooduc Road with traffic heading back towards Melbourne on a Sunday afternoon. One of the major intersections was closed this year because safety issues on it and a trial was done. This is Bentons Road. I do not know if many of you have heard of it, but there is a gravel road which offers motorists the ability to turn right before that intersection and undertake a rat run down a short gravel road and get back onto Moorooduc Road some 7 or 8 kilometres closer to Melbourne. Our residents have been ringing us weekly, letting us know anecdotally that this has been happening. So we put down classifiers on that road to discover that traffic volumes down that road have doubled since the closing of the major intersection. It is quite seasonal in that it has been happening during peak return-to-Melbourne times, which for us are late Sunday afternoons, and in February, I guess, as the schoolies return to school and a lot of our residents in their holiday homes return to their Melbourne addresses there is a quite noticeable increase of traffic on that road. So the 50-km/h limit we believe would deter a lot of drivers from driving down that road. At the moment it is unenforceable, so it is done by means of an advisory sign. Our belief is that if a regulatory sign were installed on those roads and the police were allowed to back that up with enforcement, we could certainly change the behaviours on those roads, and it would certainly give us some benefits, for sure.

Mr HARKNESS — The Mornington Peninsula has some of the best wines, as I am sure everyone would agree. This raises two particular issues. One is alcohol consumption and drink-driving throughout the municipality. The other is that many of the vineyards are a long way down gravel roads. What sorts of things can council do to address both those issues?

Mr TIFFANY — One thing we would certainly like to do, and will look to do through Roadsafe Mornington and Frankston Peninsula, is to lobby the winemakers as a group to see what we can do with them in terms of marketing the drink-drive programs that exist, and seeing if we can promote designated drivers and such programs that already exist. We work with them annually. and I believe there is a wine tasting festival at Higinbotham. The TAC has done some promotional work with them as well. We would see that as important.

Mr HARKNESS — The other thing is that there is a lot of coach traffic. Do you have any figures on bus accidents?

Mr TIFFANY — Not a lot have shown up statistically. My belief would be that there would most certainly be a high potential because they are increasing in frequency and they carry large numbers of people. As yet we have not experienced a major crash involving buses on our roads. They invariably tend to be late-night crashes which are high-speed related. A lot of them on our rural road network tend to be single vehicle crashes and run-off-road issues.

In closing you are probably aware that the RACV published a document called *Lifeline: Situation Critical*, which was its blueprint for changing the funding process for construction of roads or addressing the black spot situation on our rural road network. Some comments I would like to make would be that at face value it would seem a fantastic document; it certainly looks to address a change in the rural road network toll. However, it would disadvantage all interface councils if a policy like this were undertaken. We have extensive links of rural road network with black spots on them and this document does not recognise a funding process for local governments to be able to tap into this scheme to provide funding for that, so that would certainly concern us. I think it ignores the size of the problem in rural areas as well and that is certainly an issue for us.

Sometimes we find ourselves asking why the RACV purports to be a road safety stakeholder when in strict terms, if you look at its core business, it is an insurer that is looking to limit its losses, and it has quite a few road safety spin-off benefits for its members. Our view would be that it needs to be equitable and attractive to all state
residents. Club membership is one thing, and benefits to your club members is one thing, but we think that if you are looking to make suggestions about road safety on the entirety of the Victorian road network then it should benefit all Victorians. In closing, if you have any questions please fire them at me.

The CHAIR — I am conscious of the time. I am an advocate for road safety officers being employed by councils, and I am interested in your position. Can you describe what you do in your position, and also what is contained in the council’s road safety strategy?

Mr TIFFANY — My position is a full time. I sit in the traffic engineering section of council. I spend a lot of my day dealing with traffic engineers and residents. However, one of my primary functions is to coordinate road safety activities internally throughout the whole of council to try and connect the planners, the community department, community safety and local laws to get them to work together and consider road safety in the various decisions that they make. I spend a lot of my time working with schools and my colleague, Julie Bible, is here today as well. We have a road safety around schools program where we visit nine primary schools every year. We support the Fit to Drive program and visit 18 secondary schools on the Mornington Peninsula. My prime focus is on providing program support for community groups and schools, looking to provide sustainable programs so that once we have been into the school and started a program with them, we can support them and they can run with road safety themselves with minimal annual input then from council, but using us as a resource feeder and adviser back to them.

As you saw, the position has been in council since 2002. Our plan is only about two years old, and I believe we will look to audit the road safety strategy after another two years. Actions to take us through to 2006 were identified in of the community consultation phase, so my view would be that in mid-2005 we should consider looking to audit the strategy to see if the statistics are still relevant and still show us the same trends as they did when we wrote the document, and whether there are other areas that are showing up that we need to address.

Mr BISHOP — In relation to trees on roadsides, is it your view that council should have an as-of-right option to remove trees after it has done an audit to a particular width — it might be 2.5 metres or 3 metres? To follow on from that question: where is your council placed in relation to the road management bill, which I suspect will be debated in the Parliament this session? Have you taken a view of your responsibilities in relation to roadside objects relative to that bill?

Mr TIFFANY — We would concur with the ability to do a road safety audit of a location and if hazards were identified as being trees and that one of the ways of reducing the hazards at certain intersections should be tree removal, then we would certainly lobby for the ability to go to that site and make the necessary improvements in terms of road safety. We are strong enough in other areas that we will stand on our digs and argue for hazard removal, but the vegetation management bill makes it more restrictive to stand on your digs and advocate for roadside removal. We would certainly do that.

In terms of the road management bill, I was at a meeting two days ago, and I believe we are quite close to being able to sign off on a council road management policy. Our internal policy is all encompassing so it looks at both the maintenance issues on our road network as well as classifying it. It would certainly look to identify potentially hazardous locations on our road network and indicate to us whether we need to do road safety audits in the near future or whether we need to take immediate action. So it has been a good process to go through. It is a way of doing an internal self-audit prior to the signing-off of the road management bill itself.

Mr EREN — In relation to power poles, do you speak to the power companies in relation to their contribution towards the cost of moving some of those?

Mr TIFFANY — We certainly do. If an application to move a power pole is made then the first step would be to try to negotiate with the company about whether there is some movement on sharing the cost between us and whether they are amenable to moving it at their cost, which is obviously very unlikely, but we would certainly work with them in trying to move a pole.

Mr EREN — How have they responded?

Mr TIFFANY — They have responded quite positively in some locations because some of our residents have had the desire to transfer their power underground, and that is the ultimate benefit. Some of our residents have
been able to negotiate amenable contribution schemes to shift the power underground from a pole and that has been quite an advantage in some or our small, unsealed residential streets.

The CHAIR — Robin, thank you for your input. We appreciate Mornington Peninsula shire making your available. We also appreciate your hospitality. We will provide you with a copy of the transcript.

Witness withdrew.
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Rosebud–1 March 2004

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Witnesses

Mr M. Fleming, Manager, Engineering Services; and
Mr P. McLean, Manager, Assets and Development, Cardinia Shire Council.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome. We appreciate your time and input. We are taking a transcript and the copy of it will be provided to the shire in due course. The hearings are subject to parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be used against you in the future. We appreciate your input and look forward to hearing Cardinia shire’s submission.

Mr McLEAN — Mark and I are probably the two managers involved with road safety at Cardinia. We do not have a dedicated road safety officer, and we will get onto that a bit in one of our recommendations. At the moment we have a road safety committee with Vicroads officers and police on it as well, and we try to implement our road safety strategy, on which we have had some assistance from Ratio Consultants. It was adopted by council last year. That set seven action plans for areas that we want to target. Through the submission we have tackled six of the areas that we think are probably fairly relevant to the topics we are talking about today.

The CHAIR — Do you want to walk us through the submission?

Mr McLEAN — Yes. Just quickly, because you have a handout in front of you. Cardinia is one of the interface councils. Just in terms of rough statistics, we have about 300 kilometres of sealed roads and 1000 kilometres of unsealed roads, so we have a fairly large network of unsealed roads, and that is probably an issue for us. We are the only council on the eastern side that has a growth corridor: from Casey we have a growth coming out through Pakenham. Our population is about 45 000 at the moment, and that is likely to double in the next 10 years, so we are experiencing a fair bit of growth, I suppose.

The CHAIR — For the committee’s purposes, could you describe the geographical area you take in?

Mr McLEAN — We border Casey and take in Beaconsfield, a town there. Our main population centre is Pakenham. To the north of Pakenham you go up into the Dandenong Ranges, up to Gembrook, Belgrave, Cockatoo and Emerald. Down to the south we go to Lang Lang and Koo-Wee-Rup, along the border to Westernport and out to Bunyip on the western extremity. In terms of road safety, we are rated one of the top 10 municipalities in Victoria in road fatalities and accident statistics. We are a fair size but probably the length of unsealed roads is a concern for us. I will get Mark to run through some important data about our roads and accidents. In the last year we had nine fatalities within our shire. One of the processes we have is for the committee to go out and investigate those and see what we can do. Maybe Mark can recap on those.

Mr Flemming — Generally when we have a fatality in our area we have a situation set up where the local police members will contact council and, depending on who else is involved, possibly a member of Vicroads, and we just go out and do a joint investigation of that incident and see if there is anything that council can do or any interim works that can be carried out to help relieve the situation. What that does also is give us an insight into the types of crashes that occur and a bit of the reasoning behind them, I suppose, which generally the traffic engineer alone would not get if we do not have that information from Victoria Police. What we have listed are the fatalities within the municipality in the last year. Without going through all of them individually, you can see that a lot of them are not necessarily directly related to the infrastructure or the standard of the infrastructure. A lot of them are driver behaviour-type issues — things such as failure to give way, fatigue and driver error, I suppose.

The CHAIR — How would you read the conclusion that the accident on 5 December was a fatigue-related accident?

Mr Flemming — Essentially a truck ran off the road on the Princes Highway. There were no intersecting roads in the vicinity. The driver was killed and there was no passenger in the truck, so we cannot be sure about it, but there seemed to be no other explanation as to why that truck may have run off the road. That is a bit of information back from Victoria Police, that they believed it was a fatigue-related incident. There were no skid marks, either.

Mr McLEAN — Just one thing on that, all those nine were in rural areas; none of them occurred in our low-speed or urban areas. All the fatalities we had were in rural areas.

Mr Eren — Would you have a breakdown of whether they occurred on unsealed roads or sealed roads?

Mr Flemming — Only one of those occurred on an unsealed road. It was the one on 10 September, on Dickie Road, an unsealed rural road.
Mr McLEAN — Sorry, there were two out of the nine. The other one was a motorcyclist in Bunyip State Park. So the ones on 26 April and 10 September were on unsealed roads; the rest were on rural roads. Probably a significant fact is that three were on the Princes Highway, which is a 110-km/h speed zone, and that is something that we will raise a bit later.

With the time given to us, we might just run through our submission. We have tried to pick out just key issues and some possible improvements to them. We have made some recommendations that we think might help. If we go to road network and funding, I suppose one of the disappointments we have is that the state government black spot funding program has certainly wound back. We made about 11 submissions that we felt were fairly good submissions, but we were successful in receiving only one allocation under the federal program. I know they are weighted on a benefit-cost ratio (BCR), and they are compared to other ones, but we felt we had some fairly high BCRs and we were successful in only one. I guess that is an area where we feel that the federal black spot program needs to be extended and the state government black spot program also needs to be reinstated. They were fairly valuable programs to improve some of the key areas in our network and having only one in the whole municipality last year was a bit disappointing. We feel it would be good if the black spot program could be increased.

The CHAIR — Peter, was 2003 reflective of your previous experience?

Mr McLEAN — I suppose we tried to push it up a little bit in 2003. We did try to put in a number of applications. We probably only get one black spot program a year, but we certainly geared up the number of applications we put in in 2003.

Mr FLEMING — The second point is in relation to road standards. In Cardinia shire there is 1000 kilometres of unsealed roads, which is a significant length of road, especially given the fact that we are one of the fringe municipalities and those unsealed roads are very close to our townships. Council has put in place a scheme whereby we can construct 50 kilometres of those unsealed roads and we have chosen our key roads, and that 50 kilometre length is our local arterial roads. We are trying to create a grid or a network of sealed roads so that residents do not have to drive too far before they get onto the sealed road network. I suppose that part of that is regarded as a safety issue. Council has not been able to fund that straight out of its capital works program so we have developed a public–private partnership. It is almost like a BOOT scheme, where the private sector will fund and construct those roads for us and we will pay them back over time. We have done that because we consider that it is so important to provide that network of sealed roads, but under the current levels of funding we are unable to do that. We could have looked at borrowing more money and that type of thing, but there are limits in terms of what we can borrow and essentially we are at those limits. Being a growth municipality, there is so much infrastructure that needs to be put in place prior to the substantial rate base being in place.

Mr BISHOP — What is the payback time in that partnership?

Mr McLEAN — I have probably got a little bit more background on that. We are looking at a 15-year period — for them to design and construct the pavements for 15 years and a 10-year life after that. There have been a few issues with that, and perhaps I will not go into too much detail, but in the end it would probably have been more feasible to borrow the money rather than looking at a true PPP partnership approach, but we are still going ahead with that 50 kilometre program over a 15-year period.

Mr EREN — Can I ask for your view about speed restrictions on gravel roads?

Mr McLEAN — We will get onto that in a minute, John.

Mr FLEMING — The next point is that many of our roads have insufficient clear zones, and the greatest problem that we face is trees in the road reserves. Peter explained the geographical area that we live in. The Princes Highway runs through the centre of our municipality and to the north of that are the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges. That area is considered to be of significant conservation value, and a lot of the vegetation that council looks to try to protect is contained within those road reserves so it is difficult to strike a balance between maintaining clear zones on our roadsides and maintaining the conservation value that many of our residents want us to keep. In order to do that we are trying to consider the performance of the road. Often we will agree that the road will not necessarily perform to a 100-km/h speed limit. It will be constructed with substandard curves and clear zones and obviously the speed limit needs to be reduced on those roads. One of the problems that we face with regard to that is the VicRoads Vlimits package, which is its assessment criteria for speed limits. It allows us to consider clear zones when we put in the information, but it does not weight those factors very highly and it does not
weight the factors of substandard alignment very highly either. So it is difficult to meet the warrants for a lowered speed limit on those roads.

Mr BISHOP — On that point Mark, what difficulties do you have in your planning procedure processes in removing dangerous trees from roads?

Mr FLEMING — Our planning scheme has a fairly high emphasis on retaining that vegetation, so it is quite difficult. We find that even if we remove trees on roadsides there is a requirement to then go and replant a certain number depending on what type of tree and where it is, that type of thing. Once again it often needs to be replanted into the road reserve, and it is sometimes very difficult to find an alternate location to plant those trees.

Mr BISHOP — Do you find that process impedes your council’s ability to have your roads as safe as you would like them to be?

Mr FLEMING — I guess it is a matter of striking a balance between the environmental factors and road safety. It is difficult for us to say that a tree should be removed because someone might crash into it, but at the same time I am mindful of those environmental values and obviously want to keep them, so it is a difficult balance to strike and it is something that we are always grappling with.

Mr BISHOP — So it is the interface with the Department of Sustainability and Environment that makes your task difficult in that area?

Mr FLEMING — Yes, I guess that is fair to say.

Mr McLEAN — Just recently we have had a situation in Cardinia Road, which is part of the Pakenham bypass — it is the section that they are going to construct — and the Department of Sustainability and Environment has been fairly tough on what requirements are set there in terms of the removal of vegetation. It is trying to get that balance between what is fair to try and retain and what is important from a road safety point of view.

I will just move on to 1(c), which is road safety audits, just looking at the time. What we have tried to do in terms of our own staff is to undertake training and train up staff to become qualified road safety auditors. One of the issues that we have with road safety — and I have put it in the recommendation — is that we do not have a dedicated road safety officer. It is something that we would like to see. It is recommended in our road safety strategy. Just from council’s point of view, we are a fairly lightly resourced organisation and so I guess we cannot really afford to have a dedicated road safety officer out of council funds, so we tend to put it back to the committee. Mark and I carry out those duties and share them with other people in the organisation. It probably does not get the focus that it deserves. We have looked at sharing those roles of a road safety officer with other municipalities. That is something we are keen to do. I suppose what I have said there is that even with someone sharing the funding, it would be good for the state government to help us fund a road safety officer.

The CHAIR — How far down the track have you gone with regard to your road safety audits? How effective are they, given your limited resources?

Mr FLEMING — We have done only a couple of road safety audits at specific locations. At this stage we have carried out only three. All those audits have been on existing hazards that have been identified. Ideally, if you were to go by the book for road safety auditing you would audit your projects at a number of stages. That includes preconstruction from concept to design, during construction, and then post construction. At this stage we have been able to carry out only three road safety audits post construction.

The final point there in relation to the road network is just the delineation of our roads. This is also a constant problem for us with the length of rural roads and also the types of curves and that kind of thing that we have up in the hills. It a requires a large amount of delineation, line marking, raised reflective pavement markers (RRPMs), guide posts, and curve alignment markers. That type of delineation would help with run off road-type crashes. What I have put there as a recommendation is that financial assistance be provided to help improve that delineation for us. I guess that is looking to try to stop the run off road incidents before they occur.

Mr BISHOP — Do you use guard rails a lot?

Mr FLEMING — No, I would not say a lot. We use it on our bridges. We rarely use it on our curves. Guard rail is extremely expensive to install and guard rail in itself can be considered as a hazard to the motorist as
well, so you have to be very careful about where you put it. The design criteria for guard rail is a very specialised area, so once again that just adds to the cost of having the guardrail installed.

Mr McLEAN — I will move on to point 2, which is school safety, and buses in particular. I suppose with a large rural network one of the issues that we have is with children getting off buses. Unfortunately, back on the statistics, the 30 January statistic was a pedestrian who had just got off a bus — weather conditions were not good, it was raining and that — saw his mother on the other side of the road and ran across the road and unfortunately did not see a car coming and was killed in that accident.

The CHAIR — Was that a school bus?

Mr McLEAN — Yes, but he was off the school bus. He had left that and was waiting to cross the road to his mother on the other side and did not pick the gap. I guess what we are saying is that a lot of our rural roads where the kids are dropped off there is not a lot of room on the shoulders — we do not have large shoulders — and traffic can travel at 100 km/h, theoretically, even though they are unsealed roads and drivers should drive according to what conditions are. They are still high-speed roads, with a lot of dust and stuff. With children, they just hop off and they will either walk back along the shoulders or cross the road or whatever. We are suggesting something there. In America when the buses stop and the children get off they have flashing lights and a sign that drivers should slow to 40 kilometres an hour while the bus is stationary. Then the bus moves on. We thought that that would be a good initiative, to try to warn people, particularly when they just drop off the kids at bus stops. Also possibly a program of enhancing the bus stops by having a wider or better pull-off area, where children can come off the buses.

Mr FLEMING — Point 3 is motorcyclists. As you saw by the statistics earlier, motorcyclists are a significant problem in Cardinia shire, and 22 percent of the road users killed on our roads are motorcyclists. We are not the highest in the state in terms of that. I am not quite sure which shire is — I think it might be Yarra Ranges at the moment — but we are certainly in that top number and it is a major issue for us. I guess what we have gone through in this submission is basically a number of issues that face us in regard to motorcycle riders. Firstly we have recreational riders. I guess these are mostly trail bike riders. They come in from the suburbs of Melbourne to ride up in the Bunyip State Park and the other open areas where they are allowed to ride. One of the issues that we face is that often they are riding for the whole day. They will leave first thing in the morning and ride all day and by the end of the day they have become fatigued and are more likely to make mistakes. They are often breaking roads rules and that kind of thing — even though they are on public roads they do not ride as if they are.

The recommendation is on two levels. The first is to provide some form of education to those riders at the time they are preparing to ride, so perhaps have somebody there — a ranger or someone like that — to meet them in the car park to talk about fatigue and the problems they could face, or some signage about that. The second is to consider some sort of facility to allow off-road riding in a controlled environment. What I am talking about is perhaps a motor sports facility — motocross tracks, that kind of thing. There is nothing in that region to provide for that use, so currently they all ride in the Bunyip State Park — provided their bikes are registered, of course.

Mr McLEAN — That is something that council is looking at the moment, to try to locate a motor sports facility for cyclists — and cars as well, I think. Council is just trying to find the right land. I know that the people at Casey were not keen to have it in their area; they were happy for Cardinia to have it in our area. We are just trying to find an appropriate space to locate it. It is an issue.

In the fatalities, we did have one up in Bunyip State Park. That is a fairly frequent occurrence — fatalities up there with motorcyclists. This one was just going around a bend.

Mr FLEMING — Two trail bike riders were coming around a bend. It was a blind corner and they were actually on the right-hand side of the road on the inside of the bend. As they came out of the bend there was a four-wheel drive coming the other way. One of them got around him about the other one went the wrong way and was killed. Those types of problems we would obviously like to avoid. A lot of times those do not count on the road statistics because they are within the Bunyip State Park boundary, but I guess we still consider that they are people who have been killed in our municipality.

The CHAIR — Approximately how many riders would you have on a weekend in that situation?

Mr FLEMING — There would be hundreds on a weekend.
The CHAIR — Coming up from Melbourne and other areas?

Mr FLEMING — Yes.

Mr McLEAN — Parks Victoria have an issue. The local residents are on some of the roads with access into the state park. The residents continually complain about the noise on a weekend — just the noise of the bikes from early morning. They have tried to place certain areas within the state park where they have drop-off areas for bikes, but the car parks there get filled up every weekend. There would be hundreds. We have not got figures on them.

The CHAIR — We are talking about hundreds of riders?

Mr McLEAN — Yes. It is one of the closest areas to metropolitan Melbourne for the urban riders to get out and have a go on a dirt trail, I guess.

We have made a comment there about the grand prix down at Phillip Island and the super bike events. They do attract a lot of motorcyclists who travel down there. They become fatigued, but there are also a few hoon-type riders who do some things. Probably part of our strategy is that we need to place a greater emphasis on education about expected behaviour and that sort of behaviour. That is something that could be done through our road safety strategy that we probably need to pick up on and do there.

Do you want to talk about day trippers?

Mr FLEMING — Once again day trippers are a significant issue for us. These are the road riders who come and ride through the Dandenongs, obviously down through Emerald and Cockatoo. Those roads are good for them to ride on; there are lots of bends and nice straights and you can really test out your machinery. We find that these riders are middle-aged males who perhaps have not had a motorbike for a number of years. They get into their mid-30s and they can afford to buy themselves a nice 1000 cc motorbike and they jump on and off they go. They really do not have the experience to ride those bikes even though they are fully licensed riders — —

Mr EREN — Is that what you classify as middle aged?

Mr FLEMING — I knew you were going to say that. No, I probably should not have used the term middle aged.

The CHAIR — I am conscious of the time, so keep going.

Mr McLEAN — Vicroads has a very good program where it will provide us with money to undertake audits with a qualified motorcycle auditor to give us information, and we would encourage the continuation of that program because we have had some good results identifying problem areas.

On young children, Mark has been involved in restraint checking and he might want to talk about that.

Mr FLEMING — Just quickly, through Roadsafe Outer South East and Cardinia shire we have run a number of restraint checking days. There used to be a program called Getting It Right, which was a subsidy program for restraint checking, but none of those qualified restraint checkers were in Cardinia shire so we kicked off this program where we ran a restraint checking day on one day of each year. Each day about 30 or 40 people came through. Each year we had one restraint that was correct; all the rest of the restraints were incorrectly fitted, and obviously that is a major concern for us. Under that program everybody who came in went away with a correctly fitted restraint and if it required any parts or whatever, then the council and Roadsafe funded those parts. It would be great to have a Victoria-wide program, perhaps in partnership with someone like Kidsafe or one of the other private enterprises who might be interested.

The CHAIR — What is, or who is ROSE?

Mr FLEMING — ROSE is the acronym for Roadsafe Outer South East which is the community road safety council. In fact I will be doing a presentation on their behalf this afternoon.

Mr McLEAN — We will move on to no. 5 — safer driver and passenger — speed. Barry, this is one that you will like. There are a couple of comments there and I will clarify what we have said. For us speed on the
unsealed road network is an issue because people coming out of the urban areas are used to driving at 100 km/h on the Monash Freeway or the Princes Highway. They will come out for a day’s drive and turn off onto an unsealed road and still be used to driving at that speed. It is learning how to drive on an unsealed road, particularly for people who spend most of their time in an urban area. For us it is probably more applicable right on that urban-rural interface. We are saying two things: the Princes Highway has a speed limit of 110 km/h and we have had three fatalities this year along that highway. We have approached Vicroads to reduce that to 100 km/h, mainly because there are townships and intersecting roads and uncontrolled intersections. There are no grade separators at the intersections on that highway so there are still a lot of local roads coming in and that is where a lot of the accidents are happening — —

The CHAIR — I note the statistics about failing to give way — —

Mr McLEAN — Failing to give way, yes, or they have not seen the car or misjudged the distance and have been cleaned up. We were pretty keen to do that, but the word we have got back so far is that it is unlikely to change its mind on that, but we have asked Vicroads to drop the limit on the Princes Highway.

We have said that the default speed limit should be reduced to 80 km/h. Perhaps we should clarify that to say on certain roads. We find that with the alignment of a lot of our unsealed roads, strictly speaking you can travel at 100 km/h but in a lot of cases with the trees, the intersecting roads and the alignment, it is not really appropriate to have that. It would be great if we could mark some of them at 80 km/h , but they do not meet the current warrants under Vicroads. So there could be some relaxing so that some sections would be dropped to 80 km/h, and that is an area that we would like to see. We would also like to see police presence being increased in rural areas. I think that a lot of people fly along the back roads and greater police presence might help to reduce speed and other issues on the rural roads.

Mr BISHOP — There is a view that if someone puts an 80 km/h sign on a country road you can therefore drive at 80 km/h. There is a view that increased education and more definitive signage might be of more advantage than trying to put a speed limit that might not be suitable. Has your council looked at that?

Mr McLEAN — We get a lot of requests from people who live on the roads and say that people travelling along them break the speed limit. We say, ‘No, it is not appropriate’. We agree that people should drive according to conditions. It is probably a matter of going back to that delineation and having enough warning signage. I guess with too much warning signage people will become complacent. I do not know the answer. There are some roads which have a particular accident history where a speed limit might be appropriate. Perhaps it is a matter of appropriate warning signage as well, Barry, rather than 80 km/h across all of them.

Mr FLEMING — My personal opinion is that the 80 km/h sign does not necessarily tell the driver that they should drive at 80 km/h. All drivers know that the speed limit is 100 km/h in rural areas and generally they will drive to that 100 km/h even if it is not signed. So I think signing them at 80 km/h would reduce the speed of vehicles on those roads. Whether or not it would mean that when a road is corrugated they will drive as low as 60 km/h or whatever is appropriate, is difficult to say but my opinion is that signing the roads at 80 km/h would reduce the speed of vehicles on those roads overall.

Mr BISHOP — So you would take that view rather than education?

Mr FLEMING — You need to have a combined effort but we have been trying to educate people for ever about slowing down. It is just such a difficult field and it is hard to know if we have been effective about slowing people down over the last 10 years.

Mr McLEAN — There are three last recommendations and we will go through those. On novice drivers, without a road safety officer we have tried to implement that program ourselves. There is not a large public transport network in Cardinia, just the train up the centre. There are not a lot of buses that run from north to south. So it is an issue. A lot of the younger drivers have to drive in a car to get anywhere. So it is getting out there, and our recommendation is to get some assistance for a road safety officer and that would certainly be an area that we would like to work on. We have a public transport strategy at the moment, trying to improve public transport in Cardinia to cut back on the reliance on cars to get around.

Mr FLEMING — Fatigue is the last area. It is also something that is significant to council. We have lots of tourists who come through Cardinia shire. An issue that is raised a number of times is tourists who come from
Phillip Island, spend the day at the island, then go and see the penguins when they are normally getting into bed, and then drive home after that. That is an issue.

The statistics are not really reflecting crashes on the South Gippsland Highway in Cardinia at that time but I know they are in other councils. I guess it is only a matter of time until it happens on one of our roads as well.

One of the other things in terms of fatigue is shift workers. A lot of tradespeople go out and work in Warragul and Drouin and then drive back to Melbourne after they have finished working. Recently there was a crash involving some trade workers. In that particular case there were no serious injuries. The driver fell asleep after working all night in Warragul and ran off the Princes Highway. Fortunately there was no major collision with any roadside obstacle in that case; he just hit a ditch.

One of the things that we are on about is roadside rest stops. There are no roadside rest stops Melbourne bound on the Princes Highway.

The CHAIR — Within your shire?

Mr FLEMING — That is right.

The CHAIR — How long is that strip of road?

Mr FLEMING — It is the full width of our shire, so it would be 60 kilometres. There is an outbound rest stop at Tynong, at Gumbaya Park. That has just recently been re-signed by Vicroads, which is very pleasing to see. The inbound ones seem to be the problem for us.

The CHAIR — Have you raised that issue with Vicroads?

Mr FLEMING — Yes, we have.

The CHAIR — What did they say?

Mr FLEMING — They are looking at it.

Mr McLEAN — The last one, because I know time is getting on, is just a quick one about pedestrians and bicyclists. We have implemented a bicycle strategy. That is something we are addressing a lot through our urban development, putting requirements on developers to provide shared pathways and that. Probably the key thing that we need is to make sure that we have on the main road network, which is the principal bike network, a good main network. We are trying to do the infill. Once again, we have applied to Vicroads for funding. We are trying, particularly on the Princes Highway, to get a bike path from Officer and Berwick out to Pakenham, along that main corridor there. The intent was to look at probably putting a trail there as part of the Pakenham bypass, but due to funding restraints I think that is not going to proceed at this stage. Probably along the Princes Highway would be good. Time has run out, but hopefully we have given a few indications of the issues that are probably up to Cardinia and some recommendations that we think would be good.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Peter and Mark. Are there any questions?

Mr BISHOP — Yes. Due to my interest in driver training in schools, I noted that you have a bit in there. Would your council be supportive of the driver training in schools?

Mr FLEMING — Yes, I think we would. I guess I would like to see it form part of some other program, rather than having another program that needs to be run, because it is so difficult to find times in schools to get any programs run. We are working on the Fit to Drive program at the moment. You have probably heard about Mornington Peninsula Shire’s involvement in the Fit to Drive program. Roadsafe Outer South East has taken that program and modified it slightly to suit what we want to deliver. There is opportunity to include driver training in that program.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Peter and Mark, for your time and input. As I said, we will provide the council with a copy of the transcript.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Inquiry into Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Rosebud—1 March 2004

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
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Staff

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

Witness

Mr S. Piasente, Manager, Engineering Services, Bass Coast Shire Council.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome, Steve. We appreciate your time and the fact that Bass Coast Shire has allowed you the time. These are public hearings. We will be taking a transcript and will provide a copy of it to the council in due course. You are subject to parliamentary privilege, which means that what you say today cannot be held against you into the future. I will hand over to you to present your submission.

Mr PIASENTE — Thank you. I probably was not as organised as I wanted to be. The person who would have attended was unavailable, so I got the lucky seat.

Just to give you a bit of an understanding of our region, Bass Coast shire is a fairly small rural municipality in terms of permanent population and size, compared to a number of other rural municipalities. We do have a large influx of tourists, with an increase in population, over the primary tourist season, and that is one of the issues that I would like to raise today.

In terms of the country road toll and issues that have arisen with us, one of the main issues we want to raise is road conditions — unsealed rural roads and even some of our sealed rural roads — in having set speed limits of 100 kilometres an hour. I heard you talking to the people from Cardinia shire previously about this issue at the end of their submission. Some of the issues that we have with our unsealed rural roads is that they may be bus routes and there is also the issue of significant roadside vegetation. We often have a conflict with some of the local residents if we want to take out roadside vegetation. If we seal those rural roads we then have an increase in speeds and if the roadside vegetation remains, there is a potential for roadside casualties or accidents, which have occurred. There was one recently that was due to driver behaviour, I would think. It was a sealed rural road, excessive speed and roadside vegetation — a combination of all those.

With unsealed rural roads, we felt, in talking with a number of council officers and councillors that a speed limit of, for example, 80 kilometres per hour might be appropriate — and it has been talked about before. A number of those rural roads are bus routes and have significant roadside vegetation, so we felt that that sort of limit would be more acceptable than the open speed limit, because we find that we tend to get people trying to drive at that limit and not being able to drive safely with the road conditions as they are. It might be that, along with education.

We tend to find, when the community wants to have changes in road speed, we put up advisory signs and some people pay attention to those but probably not the majority and we might tend to have too many advisory signs, with people not paying attention in the end. One of our main issues is road conditions related to speed on those unsealed rural roads. Sometimes even when we have upgraded some of those roads we continue to have that problem with excessive speed on those roads.

Fifty per cent of our municipality is rural and quite hilly — so, undulating. We also have other issues relating to landslips and so on, so we struggle with funding to fix up some of those problems at the time. For example, where we might be able to have a speed limit rather than advisory signage on some of our rural roads we find that people do not pay attention to advisory signage over time.

We have an ageing population, and there have been a couple of incidents with older drivers, particularly in peak periods. I know of two occasions on one of our main roads where an older driver has got a little bit confused and ended up driving on the wrong side of the road. So it is about education but it is also related to our tourism traffic, which is one of our other issues. We have a significant increase in traffic over the summer months, and we also have international tourists. I am aware of a couple of incidents where international drivers have driven through intersections and have been unaware of certain road conditions that apply. One of those intersections has been upgraded through a black spot funding program. I suppose one of the issues was that council was well aware of the problems with that intersection because it was not just international tourists but other people using the intersection who had problems. We tend to be reactive with some of the funding we get to improve intersections or road conditions.

Council has a number of programs; we do risk assessments and we regularly look at the condition of our roads. We tend to have to wait to fix up some of those problems for some time. We might get black spot funding but in some instances that is too late for a lot of people. There have been a couple of incidents with our international tourists where they have not been fully aware of road rules, so that might be an education thing.

The CHAIR — Can you just describe what area Bass Coast shire takes in?
Mr PIASENTE — I have some maps I can provide to you. We extend from the boundary with Cardinia shire, so we border Cardinia and South Gippsland shires, so Tooradin and Lang Lang are our boundary to the north and we go around just past Inverloch and up through the hills. Around 40 per cent of the shire is rural — hinterland or hills as they call it — and the rest is primarily coastal. So our major tourism attraction is the penguin parade and we get a lot of people there.

The CHAIR — So you take in Phillip Island?

Mr PIASENTE — Yes, so we get a lot of traffic particularly coming down the Bass Highway and going on to the island. They are primarily Vicroads roads but we have issues with a number of roads that intersect with other tourist roads where there are inappropriate intersections. I can recall a couple of incidents with international tourists where one drove through an intersection at one of those roads. Luckily there were no other vehicles but they ended up in the front yard of a property. Another one resulted in a casualty accident although luckily enough it was not a fatality. Again they were trying to cross that particular road. We take in Phillip Island and also Inverloch. We have seen increases in tourism because of the demand for coastal properties, but also an increasing population because people are attracted to the coast.

Mr HARKNESS — Steve, is there are a higher proportion of accidents on Phillip Island compared to other places in the municipality?

Mr PIASENTE — Some time ago Vicroads identified the Phillip Island Tourist Road as a black length. Some treatments have been done to that in terms of shoulder sealing and some improved line marking but no significant upgrades. There have been some incidents on that road since then.

Mr HARKNESS — Have you captured any data on whether the people who are involved in accidents are local residents or visitors?

Mr PIASENTE — I have not looked at the data myself. The incidents I recall recently involved older drivers who were both local residents. I am led to believe that there was an incident on the Bass Highway recently which involved livestock, which is another issue again. Being agricultural land there are some issues related to that as well. Is there anything more you want to know about that?

The CHAIR — No, that is fine.

Mr PIASENTE — Phillip Island is one of the major attractions. I talked about the penguins earlier. The Bass Highway upgrade is occurring; it is being staged over a number of years although I think that has fallen behind a little bit. I think you were talking before about the need for roadside stops. I have spoken to Vicroads about those for the future stages so that people travelling long distances have an ability to stop. Vicroads is looking at that as an issue on that road in terms of fatigue.

Mr HARKNESS — Given that Phillip Island has the grand prix, what proportion of accidents in the municipality involve motorcyclists?

Mr PIASENTE — We looked at the data and when we assessed it it was no more than the state average. That is really a peak event which I believe is managed quite well. They have traffic phases on and off the island so they allow all motorcyclists to go at once. There was an incident when the grand prix was first on Phillip Island, so they changed the way they managed it and there have been significant improvements and that works quite well. There are a number of other events at the race track throughout the year involving cars as well. You get the tourist demand as well as events demand relating to Phillip Island, but also people travelling through to other areas such as Wilsons Promontory and Inverloch who might come that way.

We have a population of around 20 000 according to the census figures but we are led to believe that it peaks at around 60 000 to 65 000 over the summer period, so there is a significant increase.

Attitude and education of young drivers is one of our issues. With rural and unsealed roads you tend to get the young drivers with a bit of bravado who go out to impress their friends. There have been a few incidents relating to that. The growth in traffic is one of the other issues that will lead to a potential increase in road crashes. We have a number of developments occurring with the demand for coastal property. Also there are a number of proposed golf courses; one is under way, I do not know if the others will get up. They have hotels associated with them and as an
example, one of those developments is proposing an increase of about 4000 vehicles a day on the Phillip Island Tourist Road, which is a Vicroads road which currently carries about 10 000 vehicles a day. So that is a significant increase on that particular road which could impact on the number of incidents.

In relation to the road environment I talked before about the unsealed rural roads, excessive speed and fatigue. There are other local road issues such as the landslips that we face, being an agricultural area where the vegetation has been stripped from a fair proportion of the municipality. I think the remaining vegetation is either within nature reserves or road reserves. So where the land is quite hilly and the vegetation has been stripped, we have had a couple of incidents of landslips and I am aware of one that contributed to a fatality.

We have other issues with speed on rural roads and we worked with Vicroads on one occasion to reduce the speed limit to 80 kilometres an hour and that has been quite effective where we have wildlife and vegetation in a significant corridor. You asked a question about whether an 80 kilometre-an-hour speed limit would be observed. We implemented that last year and we are looking to do some more counting on that particular road to see how effective it has been, but in general we have felt that the majority adhere to that 80 kilometres-an-hour speed limit. It is a significant length; it is a couple of kilometres and it goes through a nature park area. Phillip Island Nature Park manages the penguin reserve as well as some other land on Phillip Island relating to wildlife. That has been quite effective. So regarding the issue about reducing speed on rural roads, if you have a blanket speed of lower value — say around 80 kilometres an hour — with education everyone may adhere to that and we feel that would reduce the incidents of potential roadside accidents.

The CHAIR — Steve, one of our inquiries is looking at accidents involving roadside objects — run-off accidents. Have you any comments or information with regard to vehicles colliding with roadside objects in your shire?

Mr PIASENTE — We have. The incidents that we are aware of relate to two areas. Vegetation is the main one where people have driven off the road and into vegetation. There have been a couple of incidents with bridges, which is one of the areas that I would like to raise. About three years ago Vicroads funded treatments to bridges and terminals, which is the guardrail at the approaches to bridges.

I am aware of a couple of our bridges where if we did that, in terms of safety the guard rail would have been a massive improvement on what was there, but in terms of the guard rails on the bridge, there were not any — it was timber in one instance. So you are having this improvement to the guard rail system at the terminals, the approach to the bridge, but the bridge itself is unsafe. Given council’s ability to fund maintenance and rehabilitation, particularly with bridges, which are quite expensive structures, we struggle with that. So finding funding for that would be of assistance. With roadside vegetation, we have actually been through a couple of projects recently.

The CHAIR — Before you leave bridges, approximately how many bridges in your shire would you consider to be unsafe?

Mr PIASENTE — Probably a handful that I am aware of, and we are in the process of upgrading — —

The CHAIR — Half a dozen?

Mr PIASENTE — Yes. Most of our bridges are ageing. We have replaced a number in the past three years with large steel culverts and put guard rails on them. We are in the process of rehabilitating two; there are probably still six others. In terms of our ability to fund those and improve safety at them, it is really probably one every two years. The only reason we were able to fund the most recent ones was because we had Roads to Recovery funding. Most of our funding goes into maintenance and our operational areas. Until Roads to Recovery came along we would have been funding a 1-kilometre stretch of rural road rehabilitation, no bridges, and very little at all in terms of road construction. Since that has come along we have actually split it strategically across roads that have bus routes, bridges, traffic volumes, and so on. I can see our bridges as an area of risk.

We do regular inspections on them but we are unable to fund the improvements in terms of safety at some of those structures. Some we have had to pull down, just because of the age of them. The load limits in one instance had been reduced down to 2 tonnes, which meant that basically people could not get across it in terms of deliveries and so on — it was for just passenger vehicles. In a lot of instances we do not have the opportunity for people to use alternative routes; the bridges are the only roads into some properties. There are no alternative routes. It would be a
significant impact on those residents, particularly for milk tankers — that agricultural industry needs to have them as their lifeline, if you like.

The other matter is vegetation, which we have a number of issues with. As I said, most of our vegetation is maintained within road reserves or nature parks. The farmland — because it is primarily a very good dairy area — was stripped of vegetation years ago. The existing roadside vegetation certainly has significance to the community, as I was saying before. I can give you an example of a particular rural road. It is an unsealed rural road, with a bus route and significant roadside vegetation. We had undertaken a road safety audit on that road. We were looking to seal that road.

Our recommendation, if we were going to seal that road, was that we basically had to strip back all the vegetation to the roadsides. We have been tossing up what we need to do. If we were able to implement a speed limit that people would stick to, that would be of benefit in that instance, rather than removing the roadside vegetation. Our alternative was to not seal it and leave it as it was, which has other issues relating to safety — skid resistance and so on, including rutting and people driving off and potentially having an incident on that road. On the issue of sealing it, we are in a bit of a quandary at the moment as to how we proceed with it.

We know that advisory signs are not that effective. Vicroads, as in the example I gave previously about wildlife, has on a couple of occasions allowed us to sign an 80 kilometres-per-hour speed limit. If that was the default speed limit, it would certainly improve the situation — or if we had a little bit more flexibility in getting consent for speed zones. We put up a number of requests, even for urban areas, and were rejected. If you look at the existing level of development as an example of road signs, even in some of our urban areas where we wanted to put 80 kilometres-an-hour speed limits on unsealed roads leading into towns, we have been knocked back on those. So there should be a little greater flexibility or some better guidelines, maybe, from Vicroads about where they would allow changes in speed limits — or a default speed limit is probably the preference.

With the example I was giving before, we have an unsealed road with significant roadside visitation. The community has already gone through a process and identified that it wants to maintain that vegetation, and we have roadside management plans for improving the quality of our environment for both flora and fauna. We would be reluctant to take out the vegetation, but if we were to seal it then we will have another issue of people trying to drive at that target speed of 100 kilometres an hour — they tend to want to travel at that speed. It is open road that is quite hilly and so on. Having that ability to have different speed limits in some of those zones, we felt, would be effective.

Our other main issue is being able to actually fund those roadworks and so on. As I was saying before, the only ability we have at the moment is to use Roads to Recovery funding, which gives us some flexibility in what facilities we upgrade, but we are fairly limited in that respect.

Mr BISHOP — You said you do road safety audits.

Mr PIASENTE — Particular projects. The road safety audit in the instance I talked about came about when we had Roads to Recovery funding. We were looking at strategic routes and that is a bus route. We said, ‘We need to do an assessment of this road in terms of road safety to see what we would need to provide’. That is how that one came out. We tend to do it with most of our new projects. For existing roads, we have maintenance staff to assess each road. We have broken the shire into zones, and they assess them on a fortnightly basis, so they drive every road in the shire every fortnight.

Mr BISHOP — I have become a bit confused between your community thrust on your roadside and the Department of Sustainability and Environment. If that audit produced a finding that you need to remove a tree for safety reasons, is that able to be done easily or is it difficult?

Mr PIASENTE — It is quite difficult. In this instance the particular project has had a road safety audit. It was recommended that even as it is we need to take out more vegetation. The community has already looked at it with a number of staff and said, ‘This is the limit to which we want to remove vegetation’. That has already been done — it was done before the road safety audit. The road safety audit people came in and assessed it — purely from a road safety point of view — and said, ‘You need to take out more vegetation. If you seal it you need to take out even more’ — to improve the clear zone, obviously. They were saying, ‘People are going to try and drive at 100 kilometres per hour as it is sealed’. In their report they said they drove it at somewhere around 80 kilometres an hour, which they felt was a reasonable speed. Even then they were saying that we need to take out more vegetation.
So obviously it is a matter of getting a balance with the community in terms of the environment and our roadside management plans about improving it, but also, as I was saying before, having a speed limit.

We do find it difficult. We have to go through a town planning process. Vicroads officers have been through a similar process along a tourist road. We have been through a number of them. In some instances we were able to put forward the reasons why we needed to have vegetation removal, and it has been approved; in other instances we have had to go back and re-assess and put in other measures — guard rails and so on. I was thinking about the town planning process on the way down and whether there is something in the road management act that will give councils the ability to remove the vegetation without the need for a planning permit. I am sure that would cause conflict.

**Mr BISHOP** — Is your council up to speed on the proposed road management act, where your responsibilities will in fact be much more clearly defined?

**Mr PIASENTE** — Yes. I have not been fully involved in the process; our assets director and a number of other staff from a planning point of view have been. At this stage our policy is that we have developed a draft and we have set some standards in relation to that on road widths and so on. I know that with the town planning process we have been frustrated on a number of occasions when we have had road safety audits, and we have pointed out the need for certain improvements, to remove additional roadside vegetation and as an example, in one instance DSE held up the process for quite a long time. Eventually we were able to proceed, but on a much-reduced basis and there are still impacts in terms of road safety. There was still some concern about that, but that is a risk. Obviously we have to work with the community and say, ‘That’s it. Through the planning process that’s all we are allowed to remove’.

**The CHAIR** — Are there examples in your shire of trees that have been identified and risks that remain there today through that planning process?

**Mr PIASENTE** — In one project we are working on at the moment they remain. That has been identified and that road safety audit occurred at the end of last year.

**The CHAIR** — Are you still working through that process?

**Mr PIASENTE** — That is one. I know that Vicroads worked on the Phillip Island Tourist Road for quite some time and they had a proposal to remove vegetation — it was an A standard road — so that it to met their standards in terms of widths and so on. They were unable to get that through. They have now said, ‘It’s a B standard, although we feel it’s an A standard road in terms of the significance of it, the traffic generation, the maintenance needs and so on’, so that remains. You are really getting the level of traffic for an A standard road, I would guess, but they have basically said, ‘We’ll change it back to a B standard road’. That is a clear example.

**The CHAIR** — So you are still getting the A standard traffic and you have got the vegetation on the side of the road that you regard as dangerous?

**Mr PIASENTE** — Yes. In that instance it was changed to a B standard to meet the guidelines that Vicroads had set out. We have not done road safety audits on all of our roads just because of cost, but I am sure that if we went through that process and it said that we needed to take out vegetation that we would not able to do it either from a planning point of view and we would not be able to fund it in the short term, but that could change over time if we had funds available.

**Mr EREN** — Steve, I just noticed that in the fiscal year 2002–03 there was an increase of 23 per cent in the number of drivers who were charged with alcohol-related offences and an increase of 126 per cent relating to speed offences. Do you have an explanation of why that might have occurred?

**Mr PIASENTE** — No.

**Mr EREN** — No?

**Mr PIASENTE** — In relation to speed, I suppose.

**Mr EREN** — Were they at peak tourist times?
Mr PIASENTE — No, I am not aware of that. I know that in terms of policing we have had a greater presence over the peak period and that obviously relates to when the demand is as well. We do our own traffic assessments on roads and the volumes increase significantly but the speeds generally do not, so speed is pretty consistent on the roads where we do a count. Generally people exceed the speed limit by about 15 per cent on most roads; on some local roads we have higher increases than that. That again relates to the signage issue even in urban areas. I have been concentrating on our rural roads but even in our urban areas where it is 50 kilometres an hour we have had a number of incidents where people travel above that on some roads and so we look at other measures there. Signage is probably our last resort in terms of putting the speed up; we encourage people to travel at lower speeds so it is a much safer environment. The same applies to rural roads. Where we are upgrading roads we are getting this conflict with roadside vegetation.

Mr EREN — But clearly the message is not getting across with these statistics in the Bass Coast shire. So if you reduced the speed limit, would perhaps 126 per cent become a 250 per cent increase? Is there an education program?

Mr PIASENTE — Yes, we have an adopted road safety plan. We do not have a road safety officer, and that is one issue that we have. For example, we have a stormwater management plan and we have received funding from the state government to fund an officer across two municipalities. So on the same basis a road safety officer would be of benefit in educating our younger drivers and even our older drivers as well as the general community. We have a number of programs in our aged and disability services area where we were going to community groups, elderly citizens groups and so on and doing some education with them but that has dropped off as well so having an educational role would be of benefit to the ageing population as well as the younger population.

We find it on the unsealed roads as well as in residential areas where people get a thrill from spinning their wheels on the gravel and making a lot of dust and fishtailing and so on. Recently council went to court and lost a case where a young driver who was in a residential zone lost control of the car at excessive speed and ended up in a drain and sued council for inappropriate roadsides. With younger drivers we have a lot of requests for improvements in the traffic management measures in residential areas but we simply cannot fund them so education would help in that area. I think that probably covers all the points that I have.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your input, Steve. We appreciate your time and will provide you with a copy of the transcript in due course.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Inquiry into Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Rosebud–1 March 2004

Members

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

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

Staff

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

Witnesses

Mr B. George, Road Safety Officer, City of Frankston; and
Sergeant. B. Buchan, Roadsafe Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Council.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the Roadsafe Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Council. These are public hearings and we are taking a transcript and will provide your council with a copy of it. You are subject to parliamentary privilege so what you say today cannot be held against you into the future. We look forward to your submission and hand over to you.

Mr GEORGE — Thank you. In starting I would first like to talk about roadside objects because it is something that Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula have been significantly involved in. If you look at the statistics for Frankston, fatal crashes involving hitting a fixed object account for about 54.5 per cent of all deaths on the road, serious injuries account for 27 per cent and other injuries are 19 per cent, which is a pretty clear indicator that once you hit a fixed object you become a fatality — not many walk away. The objects that are being hit are: trees, 33 per cent; and poles, 21 per cent, so we are looking at the general structure of what we have around the community.

The crash types involve basically 62 per cent leaving the road on the straight, so the issues we are talking about are not losing control on bends but a significant contribution from losing control just on the straight. In talking about that, as drivers we have a responsibility not to go off the road, not to be there, but there is that very important responsibility to make it as forgiving as possible when they do come off the road.

Our crash locations are basically Vicroads roads, with the Frankston Freeway, the Nepean Highway and Thompsons Road sitting at the very top of the agenda. Throughout the community Roadsafe had a significant push about the Frankston Freeway, which has had a significant number of crashes. It would be one of the very few unprotected freeways, with massive vegetation and growth down both sides and very close to the road. On the need to have clear zones, in its documentation Vicroads provides some great information on clear zones, but that is not always possible.

On the issue of the utilities, in our area we have a large number of areas which were developed in very early times. Poles were put up where it was convenient, without a thought for the environment and the drivers, should they come off the road. Probably in the days they were built you would not come off very hard, but today we are hitting them fairly hard. It is important to think about how you go about managing the removal of those utility poles over a period of time. An enormous amount of infrastructure is required to do that. All our new developments, of course, have underground electricity and other services. The poles that people are hitting in that local environment are either slip-base or frangible-type poles, which are providing a better degree of safety than fixed objects. I think there needs to be a very clear message coming from government on how we are going to achieve those infrastructure changes. Today we were travelling down on the Moorooduc Highway, where there are instances of frangible poles that right next to them have trees that you are likely to hit before you hit the poles. Those are the issues that flow from those roadside objects.

In terms of what we need to do, I think there is a whole range of issues. We have to look at road design, construction and maintenance right from the very outset. Today, with road safety audits being part of the overall strategy, these highlight the areas of concern, but they cannot always be addressed, as the previous speaker was talking about — and there is a conflict of environment and a whole range of issues that make it difficult.

The planting of trees and where and how they are placed is a significant contributor. As we indicated, on the Frankston Freeway they are very close to the road. In Sergeant Buchan’s presentation you will hear that there are a significant number of crashes involving trees.

I have previously mentioned the issue of a utility poles. The road authorities have very strict guidelines as to what they are doing; I do not think the same relates to utilities. They come in and put in their power poles in some very awkward situations and positions. I do not think they are as responsible about the road safety side when they do those things. Guard rails are, of course, a hazard in themselves. The provision of the appropriate structures to protect people where we cannot remove the trees and poles is an essential part of the strategy that needs to come forward.

I suppose one of the issues that comes out of all of this is the reporting of accidents. A lot of crashes that occur involve no injury, but highlight and indicate that there is a crash and there is a hazard sitting at the road that maybe will result in a fatality the next time around. That reporting process does not happen. There is nothing coming from the drivers of tow trucks and others involved in crashes that have occurred. I think we have to really review how we report and put on the table the statistics relating to crashes.
That is where I would like to conclude on roadside objects. I will leave it with Bruce to look at the Frankston Freeway as a particular example of a road with roadside objects.

Sgt BUCHAN — As Bob said, I would like to focus on the Frankston Freeway because it highlights quite a few road deaths in our area in recent years. The Frankston Freeway runs for about 10.5 kilometres and links up with the Moorooduc Highway. It runs between Springvale Road and Cranbourne Road. In 2001, six people were killed on that road as a result of leaving the carriageway and hitting fixed objects, mainly trees. The freeway was constructed in the early 1970s. The plantation on the freeway on both sides and in the centre was either planted or left in situ as a glare reduction for motorists, for northbound and southbound traffic. It is unfortunate that the vegetation on either side of the freeway has matured. There are some are 30-year-old trees now that are quite huge and unforgiving. They seem to contradict the VicRoads standard for vegetation and they have not been culled, to keep them in line with current thinking about Roadsafe objects and safety.

That particular freeway is fairly unique in that it was built up in a wetlands area, through the Seaford swamp, so it had to be higher than the surrounding land. It creates a unique environment in that the road is higher than some of the surrounding land on either side of it, where the trees grow. As a consequence, when vehicles run off the road for various reasons — driver error, fatigue, drugs, alcohol, or speed — the vehicles become airborne. Once they become airborne there is no control. That contradicts the VicRoads standard of having a 9-metre clear zone for vegetation, because there is just no way that the drivers of the vehicles can regain control and come back onto the carriageway. The trees are huge. They are melaleucas or gum trees. I have a slide show that I will present later. It will give you an indication of the type of vegetation there.

If you compare the Frankston Freeway to the Monash Freeway, which has had some serious upgrades of late, the Monash Freeway sits in basically a valley. If cars run off the road they run up an embankment and then come down. With the Frankston Freeway it is the opposite: they run off and down. Therefore the cars leave the road with high momentum. There is nothing for the driver of such a car to do except hang on. He cannot skid or turn — he cannot do anything. In 2001 we lost six people as a result of that type of collision.

If you look at it from a statistical point of view it looks more alarming than the numbers. We had 19 people killed in 2001 in the Frankston local government area, and 78 per cent of those killed on the Frankston Freeway carriageways were as a result of vehicles leaving the road and colliding with fixed objects. If you break them down even further, they indicate whether they ran off to the left or the right. The current thinking and the importance of that is indicated in the fact that VicRoads is currently undertaking a campaign of putting centre barriers down to stop northbound and southbound vehicles from crossing the carriageways and having head-ons. For Frankston you have to look at what is beside them, on the left as well as the right. The majority of the people lost control and went across to the left and struck fixed objects.

The CHAIR — What do you suggest that we can do to rectify the problem?

Sgt BUCHAN — It is not an easy fix because you have quite a few issues there. I have approached the local greens to see what they felt about removing vegetation. They do not have a problem with that so long as it is not something of significance like the river gums that are near Rutherford Road in the Carrum area, which are significant historical trees. But we have to look at the type of tree that we have got and why the tree is there. I believe the melaleucas down the centre of the road were put there for glare reduction to stop headlights from shining onto opposing vehicles. The trouble is that they are 30-years-old now and they are as hard as ironbark. If a car hits one it will be destroyed and in fact we have had a few deaths that way. I like trees: I do not believe we should be ripping out every tree, but we should be protecting the car from that tree either with barriers or if they cannot be protected by a barrier then the tree must be removed. We cannot have both; we cannot have aesthetic value and safety, it is either one or the other.

Mr HARKNESS — At what sort of distance from the carriageway would a vehicle hit a tree? You have described how they can become airborne — —

Sgt BUCHAN — Yes.

Mr HARKNESS — What sort of distance from the carriageway?

Sgt BUCHAN — Four or 5 metres. The VicRoads standard is 9 metres. On Centre Road up near Thompsons Road it is probably 15 metres between the northbound and southbound lanes, but once you hit wet
grass it is just like being on ice and 9 metres is not enough. We have had a few cars that have gone right across the 15 metres into the opposing traffic, which is very dangerous for the facing traffic.

I presented a paper to the 2002 Roadsafe conference at the Hyatt. The coroner saw it and approached me and suggested that we get together to talk about strategies. I approached Vicroads which was a co-presenter at that conference. It has been very supportive of the move to have barriers along the freeway — all freeways, of course, but we were looking at the Frankston Freeway as a project. But it gets down to money. Letters have been written to Peter Batchelor and he has referred it to Vicroads, but when it is putting up so many projects, there are not enough dollars to go around.

Mr HARKNESS — That is particularly Brifen wire barriers?

Sgt BUCHAN — Yes. In my brief I did not want to lock myself into Brifen, but there is a push for wire rope barriers because they have some good maintenance characteristics and they are a lot more forgiving in most accidents. The disappointing thing is that nothing has progressed in the two years since that conference, and I think it is down to money. I welcomed the chance to present this paper to this parliamentary committee with a view to something being done. Frankston is no different to all country areas; they are all the same. There are long, boring roads and people travel long distances and are fatigued, drunk or drugged. They make a mistake and go off the road, and, as Bob said, it is what they hit at the end. We know why these people crash to some degree — because the toxicology and autopsy tells us they were drunk or on drugs, and we know that they were tired, from speaking to the family. One thing is sure — we know why they died and that is because they hit something very hard. It is still happening, although fortunately we have had no more fatals since we mounted a big campaign on that road. But the thing is that the accidents are still occurring and if a person is not injured Vicroads does not want to know about it; it does not go on the database.

The CHAIR — Bruce, you referred it to Minister Batchelor who has referred it to Vicroads — —

Sgt BUCHAN — That is right.

The CHAIR — What is Vicroads saying to the local community or to yourself?

Sgt BUCHAN — I have a contact within Vicroads who wants to remain anonymous, but he said, ‘Look, it is a great project, Bruce, but with all the projects that it was competing with it did not get up’. I do not know what projects it is competing with — —

The CHAIR — What sorts of costs are we talking about?

Sgt BUCHAN — Early estimates were about $5 million to do the Frankston Freeway and Moorooduc Road. I do not know how far down Moorooduc Road it becomes the Mornington Peninsula, but I was told $4.5 million or $5 million to do the area that I was thinking about. That does not tell me whether it is going to be both sides of the road or just the centre. For it to work properly at Frankston it has got to be to the left of the traffic and the centre to stop people from running off and hitting fixed objects.

If I can now take the opportunity of putting on the Powerpoint presentation.

Overheads shown.

Sgt BUCHAN — This is the same presentation that was given to the 2002 conference. That shows a battery left over from a previous collision. I believe that is called a melaleuca tree; it is as hard as iron. That is at the top of the embankment.

Mr EREN — Do you think that using a guardrail might assist there?

Sgt BUCHAN — Absolutely. You can see that that type of tree — if melaleuca is the right name for that tree — also grows in the centre. You can see that it is only a couple of metres from the bitumen shoulder so once they hit the grass they will not recover.

That is a tree that was chopped down by the SES after it had been impacted by a car. That is the cross and the flowers that were left by the family of the deceased and at the top left corner you can see the concrete edge of the freeway next to the emergency lane.
There was a fatal accident just south of the location shown on that slide. A lady lost control. She was driving with one arm; the other arm was broken. She lost control on the bend, went sideways into the tree and was killed instantly. It was not a really big tree either — but she was driving a little Japanese car and it took out the B-pillar.

The next slide was taken approaching Thompsons Road, heading north. As you can see, the freeway has been built up because it is very wet on the flat.

The next slide was taken on the Moorooduc Highway, travelling south. There is an SEC pole with a breakaway coupling, but it is the same distance away as a mature gum tree. If you are lucky enough to hit the SEC pole, that will break away. If you are unlucky enough to hit the gum tree, it will not move.

The next slide shows the remains of one of those general VicRoads signs saying, ‘Frankston North turnoff 100 metres’. He hit that first and then he hit the tree. You can see it is down a slope from the road. He had been to a party and had been drinking. He was not supposed to drive, but he changed his mind and decided to drive from Prahran back home to Mount Eliza.

**The CHAIR** — What was the cause of the accident there?

**Sgt BUCHAN** — I think he fell asleep whilst intoxicated.

**The CHAIR** — The road was wet, was it?

**Sgt BUCHAN** — The road was wet. A taxidriver located the car. A small fire had been caused by the collision and that is the only reason they knew the car was there, because it was down a slope. He was still strapped in the car.

The next slide shows the only section of Brifen wire that we have on the Frankston Freeway. It is south of the Frankston–Dandenong Road. It was put in to prevent northbound and southbound cars from intruding. It is probably the narrowest median strip on the whole freeway. It does get hit from time to time, but VicRoads will just come down and do some maintenance and you would not even know that there had been a collision there. We have had only one death involving a vehicle hitting the Brifen wire, and that was of a motorcyclist who was travelling at 150 kilometres an hour and lost control on the bend. He was flung over the wire. His bike actually stayed on the correct side of the road, but he was flung over and was killed.

**Mr HARKNESS** — I noticed on the way down here this morning that there was an accident of some sort on the Moorooduc Highway, which just reinforced the idea that accidents are continually happening on the road. Do you know any more detail about that as an example?

**Sgt BUCHAN** — Yes. Someone failed to give way and hit another car on the Moorooduc Highway. One of the cars then hit a roadside sign, so it was a bit of road furniture that it hit. One person was taken to hospital as a result of those two collisions.

**Mr HARKNESS** — This may be a question for Bob. We have travelled fairly extensively over the state and have learnt that are not too many councils have road safety officers, which I find strange, given that both yourself and Robin from the Mornington Peninsula shire are in this area. Could you describe for the committee your role and how you are funded and the different types of things that you do and how that relates with Bruce’s job and other people in the community?

**Mr GEORGE** — At Frankston council I am employed three days a week as the road safety officer. My role is very much a community role, in dealing with issues of road safety as raised by members of the community. I am also involved with Roadsafe. In that role I am trying link our council activities with Roadsafe, to make sure that we can get the maximum benefit from the efforts we make. Most of the councils that have a road safety officer have trailers for speed observation to try to put a message across to people. I think they provide a valuable tool in the community. We are looking to extend the number that we are using — we are hoping to double it from one to two in our next financial year.

A lot of my time has been working in and around the schools. I have also been involved in the almost feral behaviour — I suppose I would have to describe it as that — of people who should be the most caring on the road, parents and carers coming to pick up their children. During that 20 minutes they exhibit every terrible behaviour that you would like to see. As part of that I have developed a strategy of road safety schools for Frankston, which
embraces a whole range of issues, with a committee in the schools looking at road safety and the issues around the schools and supported by me in my role as the road safety officer. This embraces looking at every possible issue, including how they can reduce the number of cars around the school through walking school buses or any other aspect they take on and trying to put together strategies and priorities for work around the schools, whether they need more school crossings and those aspects. So I have spent a lot of time in and around the schools during the time I have been in this role and a lot of time in educational programs, talking with groups around the community and working with the community to try to create a greater awareness in taking some ownership of road safety within the community. Rather than expecting VicRoads or the council or everybody else to do the work, I think the community has a lot of work to do and trying to move some of that ownership back into the community is one of the activities that I have been heavily involved with.

So there is a whole range of activities that we do get involved with, from purely talking to people about speeding and hoon behaviour in their street, right through to trying to manage the whole road network that we have throughout the community. Hopefully that addresses some of the issues.

Mr HARKNESS — Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula are right on the urban fringe. As such I guess we still have a lot of unsealed roads throughout your police district, up into Carrum Downs and south of Frankston. What proportion of accidents around the area are on those rural-type roads, and are you able to provide any further breakdown as to what type of accidents they are?

Sgt BUCHAN — Frankston’s local government area is actually developing so fast that a lot of those country-type dirt roads are disappearing as estates go up, which is a good thing in total, but creates other problems with traffic flow. I cannot speak on behalf of the Mornington Peninsula — I do not know that area that well. I think in 2001 we had only one fatal on a dirt road and that was because of inexperience on a corrugated road. They do not list highly on our roads; they are mainly the major arterial roads. We do not have many fatalities in built-up areas like side streets. We seem to have our proportion of accidents on the main roads like Cranbourne Road, Frankston–Dandenong Road, Nepean Highway and the freeway — that is the type of carriageway where the majority of cars can generate high speeds.

Mr HARKNESS — Funding has been mentioned by many of the presenters and, of course, here as well. I know that Victorians provide 25 per cent of fuel tax revenue but only get 15 per cent back in the form of road funding. I was looking at some figures the other day and Frankston has only received a little over $2 million from the Roads to Recovery funding compared to substantially more in every neighbouring municipality. I wonder what your view about that is?

Mr GEORGE — I think in many ways that Frankston has been short-changed in terms of the general community’s feel about Frankston. In the road safety area while we have had some reasonable funding under the black spot program and we have achieved some results there, I think the overall road funding is significantly less than other communities and I would like to see changes in those areas. We work extremely hard to try and get funding, but obviously our priorities are not high enough up the list to achieve that.

Sgt BUCHAN — I would just like to add that, as you know, I have been trying to raise the profile of the road toll on the Frankston Freeway and the Frankston area. In Frankston we hear about the toll road, but that is not the right toll I want to talk about. I want to talk about people dying, not the fees they pay. I find it very hard to compete with that sort of publicity.

Mr BISHOP — Bob, you say you are in and around schools a lot, and I have also observed the behaviour of people picking up their kids, and probably the fact that kids might get the wrong message. Have you a view on driver education in the schooling system and perhaps even extending it into the curriculum?

Mr GEORGE — I have a very strong view on education, particularly road safety. In Frankston we are trying to take road safety education right from preschool age through to secondary students. In Frankston we have a Fit to Drive program, which is a locally developed and driven program, very generously sponsored by Blue Scope Steel, as it is now called — formerly BHP. That program addresses years 10, 11 and 12 in every secondary school in Frankston, both public and private.

I see road safety skills as an everyday skill that we need and use, yet it is not in the curriculum and I find that very difficult to live with. The education department has reduced the role of its traffic safety education department — from a 5-day-a-week job it has gone back to 2-days a week. Traffic safety education personal development leaders
are disappearing over the horizon, so traffic safety education is shifting further into the background. Part of the reason why I developed the road safety school strategy was to try and put a greater emphasis on road safety education and have the community in the school push for that road safety education. I believe if we had the strength to put that into the curriculum we would develop good attitudes and hopefully good behaviour in young people right from the outset and possibly reduce some of the influences they have as they get older.

I might get on another hobbyhorse. They are pounded and pummelled by the automotive manufacturers about speed, speed, speed — zoom, zoom, zoom. All of those messages are coming across to young people. You know the ads and you put the images in front of you as soon as I say those words. I think we need to influence them to think about safety in the vehicle and other road users. I would love to see that attitude developed through the curriculum — at preschool age when mums, dads and carers can become role models and show them the way. Then as the kids grow and develop they have a good attitude towards road safety and then maybe we will not have years when 30 per cent of deaths on the road are in the 18-to-25-year old age group, which I find abhorrent. So that is my view on education and advertising by automotive manufacturers.

The CHAIR — Thanks. I am well and truly conscious of the time, so we thank you both for your time today. We will provide your council with a copy of the transcript in due course.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Inquiry into Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Rosebud—1 March 2004

Members

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

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

Staff

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

Witness

Mr R. Troutbeck.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome, Bob. You have heard the spiel all morning, so I will not go through that again, but before you make your submission I need you to state your name and address.

Mr TROUTBECK — Yes, that is fine. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this committee today. My name is Robert Troutbeck. I am a private citizen; I do not represent any party or group of people, but I am a concerned road user —

The CHAIR — We need your address Bob.

Mr TROUTBECK — Sorry. 133 Grassland Roads, Boneo, which is a rural road out the back of Rosebud.

My concern today is the role played by government, manufacturers and the bureaucracy. I have a case before me right now which I have been battling for three months that relates to this road safety issue. We have heard here today how cars are hitting trees off the road. Recently I purchased a new Ford Fairlane with a 1600 kilogram tow bar on it, which is a Ford manufactured product. In the owner’s manual Ford tells me — but not before you buy the vehicle — that you cannot put any load-levelling instrument onto that tow bar. My physics at high school were a few years ago, but I realise that if you put a 1600 kilogram weight on the back of a car you will raise the front by about 35 millimetres and the back goes down by 77 millimetres. As a result of that, when you drive that vehicle in that condition you are breaking two road rules and you could be fined for having an unroadworthy vehicle, which is a $500 fine, and another infringement of dazzling drivers, which is a $300 fine. My argument is this: why do we allow a manufacturer to put that on the market before unsuspecting owners of these vehicles and do nothing about it.

You might ask what I have done about it. On 4 November last year I sent a fax to Mr Geoff Polites, who is the president of Ford Australia. I received no reply. On 17 November I sent another fax, and I got a reply by telephone — nothing in writing — to advise that Ford would put another tow bar on the car at an additional cost of $450 — I have already paid $350. On 22 November I presented all this documentation to Consumer Affairs Victoria by way of a three-page fax and a three-page submission. On 15 December I sent another fax to Mr Polites expressing my disappointment at no resolution. I asked him: where do we go from here? On 16 December Consumer Affairs Victoria advised me that it was passing the matter over to the ACCC and that the trader would be advised that the alleged conduct might indicate a possible breach of the Trade Practices Act. On 23 December I received a two-page letter from the ACCC, which basically said that it understands that the basis of my complaint comes under division 2 of the 1974 act — which means nothing to me, but appears to be a civil claims list of VCAT and to pursue my claim through VCAT.

On 29 December I sent another fax to the ACCC, clearly outlining my position and intentions — and one was not to take it to VCAT. I consider that a complete waste of time. I then got another letter from the ACCC, confirming their earlier comments on this issue. The only solution they could offer was to put it into VCAT’s hands.

On 29 December I put a submission to the Department of Transport and Regional Services and that submission contained 26 pages of background data. On 29 January, one month later, I had a telephone call from an officer of the department. His advice to me was that when I drove that car with the caravan on the back with my headlights on — and I quote verbatim, to ‘adjust the headlights when towing the caravan at night’ and ‘passenger cars were not designed to tow caravans, hence no regulations’.

The CHAIR — Where did that reply come from?

Mr TROUTBECK — The Department of Transport and Regional Services in Sydney — this is the federal government department. My approach and reaction to that was that is not a realistic approach. Is this man saying to all people who tow a caravan with the current model Ford towbar on that every night before they move off they have to adjust the headlights? That is ridiculous.

I then sent another letter to Ford. On 13 January this year I got a letter back from the Senior Quality Controller — the first letter I have ever received from Ford on this problem — in response to my letter of 22 November, which was addressed to Consumer Affairs Victoria. It contained nothing other than confirming that Ford do not make the equipment to fit on the current towbar which fits on the current passenger vehicle Ford.
On 20 February 2004 I sent a three-page fax back to Mr Polites, Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Senior Quality Controller of Ford. The purpose of that fax was to again place on the record my position and perspective on the overall problem which Ford has created and is loath to address, and additionally to propose a circuit breaker in an endeavour to find a resolution. I also told Ford — and this is a critical point of this — that my history with them over 21 years was that I buy a new Ford, usually Fairlanes, every 2.65 years. I have paid Ford dealerships over this period of 21 years — when I say ‘I’, I mean I and my wife — over $300 000, which is $14 000 a year, buying new cars. Also, it is illegal to drive the car in its present condition in Victoria.

I did put in an offer in that last presentation to them. My offer was of taking the towbar off — I will not drive with it; it is unroadworthy. I said, ‘You take the towbar back and you give me a complementary 15 000-kilometre service on the new car’ — and I have heard nothing to date.

What I would like to suggest to this committee is that maybe governments, federal and state, and their bureaucracy in relation to consumer affairs, the ACCC and the Department of Transport and Regional Services might like to take this up with the manufacturers. It seems disgraceful that they can put out a product which renders the vehicle unroadworthy. When you put that caravan on — and we have heard here today how you can go off the road — you are taking one-third of the weight off the front tyres with that van on in that position and putting that amount onto the back tyres and lifting up the front of it. With the ABS braking system and when trying to brake on those bends, you have no hope — you would lose the car and your caravan and, of course, you would hit the obvious trees.

That is all I have to say, Mr Chairman, but I have here, if you wish, copies of all this correspondence to the various parties if it is any use to the committee.

The CHAIR — Bob, what I suggest is that if we take that correspondence on board I am happy as the chair of the committee to refer it on to the appropriate minister, whether that is the Minister for Transport, the Minister for Consumer Affairs or any other minister for their information and appropriate action. Have you also raised it with your local member of Parliament?

Mr TROUTBECK — No. I have avoided that. The simple reason is that we are involving another person. I think I have as much clout as the local member has in this area — namely, that I deal direct with the manufacturer. As a secondary thought, I went on to the instrumentalities.

The CHAIR — If you like, as I say, we are happy to take the information from you, and I can refer it on to the appropriate minister.

Mr TROUTBECK — Thank you very much. That was the basis of my presentation.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Bob.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll
Inquiry into Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Rosebud–1 March 2004

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

Witnesses
Mr D. Richardson, Manager, Engineering and Environmental Services; and
Mr P. Hamilton, Team Leader, Traffic Management, City of Casey.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the City of Casey. We are taking a transcript of the proceedings and will provide the council with a copy of it. You are subject to parliamentary privilege which means that what you say today cannot be held against you in the future. Having said all that, we appreciate your input and will hand across to you for your submission.

Mr RICHARDSON — I am David Richardson and I am the manager of engineering and environmental services with the City of Casey.

Mr HAMILTON — I am Paul Hamilton and I am the team leader of traffic management with the City of Casey.

Mr RICHARDSON — So we both come from the engineering field. The City of Casey’s adopted position is the written submission we previously forwarded to the committee. This presentation is really just to elaborate on council’s adopted position. To give you some background, a map of the City of Casey is attached to the presentation we handed to you.

The City of Casey is the largest and fastest-growing municipality in Victoria. The population is currently at 209,000, and it is expected to grow to 300,000, making it as big as Canberra is today. Currently, approximately 65 families move in every week, or 10,500 people each year. If you look at the map, the City of Casey is located 40 km south-east of Melbourne. As an urban fringe council there is a limited public transport service and hence the primary mode of transport for the community is the car. Therefore, road safety and mobility is one of the most important issues for the community and consequently the council. At the current growth rate the City of Casey is experiencing an extra 4000 vehicle trips a week on the road network. As our submission highlighted, the City of Casey has the highest recorded figure of road accidents and crashes with roadside objects. Where I have italicised text in the presentation it is the same as our written presentation and so I will not repeat it all.

The City of Casey has been actively addressing the issues related to road safety for the council’s road safety strategic plan. The council supports this inquiry into crashes involving roadside objects. The aim of most public systems is zero tolerance to personal injury risk and it should be an aim in the road traffic system. The risk of personal injury will reduce through the improvement of the roadside environment. Roadside environments that are driveable without fixed objects reduce the risk of an errant vehicle leaving the road and having a severe accident. Unfortunately, Australia as a typical western country has accepted risk in the road traffic system. While the road traffic system has a reliance on correct human behaviour and decision making, there is an acceptance of risk to human life. The benefit of the risk is calculated in the ability of the individual to be able to reasonably afford to drive throughout the community providing they meet the basic criteria of having a licence and following the road rules; the use of a road reserve to provide other services to the community and the improved environment, amenity and character of an area through trees and landscaping in the road reserve.

On the existing design guidelines, we just want to elaborate on where they do not achieve. As I said, I will not go through the whole lot. The italics are in our previous submission. To achieve landscaping through tree planting in streets and meet the current clear zone requirements, the road reserve width needs to be increased. There is a real cost to increasing the road reserve. The developer, but ultimately the property purchaser, would cover the cost for the increased road reserve width or the initial cost will be too high and there will be no allowance for large trees.

If you have a look at the example of one of our trunk collector roads, which is figure 1, if we were to achieve the current guidelines of a 3-metre width — these are reasonably young trees — you would not be able to achieve the planting of even those trees in the medians along the road reserve.

In our local streets — and I have a photograph of an existing street — the road reserve is more than an area for traffic to travel along. The community puts a high social value on the amenity of the area through the appearance of the road reserve. This is reflected in Casey through the greater valued streets in the city of Casey, which are the older areas with large avenue trees. The photograph that is figure 2 is an example of an older area in the city of Casey. You can see the power poles are closer than is allowable if you allow 3 metres off the traffic lane under the current guidelines.

In recognising the high value that is put on trees, the new areas have been planned to create the higher value through an avenue effect with large street trees. The photograph in figure 3 is of a typical local street. If you look at that figure, you will see the trees are very small at this stage but they will grow up to be large avenue trees. The street lighting is also all within what are recognised as the current clear zone guidelines. The road reserve width, if
you look at the property line with the footpaths and the mailboxes on the left of the photo, clearly shows that there is no room to move to plant the trees further out. The current property lot sizes mean that there is really no allowance within the properties for large trees. The current clear zone guidelines do not allow for large street trees in the nature strip.

Going to page 5, clear zones on arterial roads are critical for road safety. The community, however, wants road reserves that add to the environment. I have included that recent press article that is figure 4 on page 5. There has been quite a bit of press about the suggestion of removing one of the poplar trees for a new access into a new estate. It is an avenue of honour tree, but it highlights the value that the community puts on that tree.

If you look at the picture on the next page, which is a photo of the same avenue, it shows one of the avenue trees. It is a significant size and is well within the clear zone requirements but there is a high community expectation that we maintain and actually even provide trees and avenues of honour to improve the amenity of the area, even though it is against a sympathetic road environment.

The CHAIR — Where is that picture taken?

Mr RICHARDSON — That is the Princes Highway, just east of Berwick on the way to Beaconsfield — on the way to Cardinia shire. That is currently an 80 kilometres-an-hour speed zone. That whole avenue has been quite topical, actually, because there was a suggestion of removing one of those trees for a new access out and to improve sight lines.

Mr BISHOP — On page 6, where there is the photograph with the truck in it, you say that the community expectation is that both aims can be delivered — that is, road safety and amenity through street trees. How are you going to do that?

Mr RICHARDSON — I suppose that is the most difficult question. It is a question we have been dealing with in Casey. I suppose what we get down to is that on arterial roads, recognising the existing network, where you have to value the existing trees and they are just about impossible to protect through barriers and so forth, and on the newer streets, particularly in the local areas where the clear zone guidelines are not particularly clear in the lower speed environments, recognising that you can have trees closer to the kerbs than currently exists, particularly in the 50 kilometres-per-hour speed zones.

Mr BISHOP — This one is an 80 kilometres-per-hour speed zone.

Mr RICHARDSON — That is right. In this position I would say you would be looking at reducing the speed zone but you would not be looking at reducing the trees. There would be community outrage if you removed the trees. I suppose I highlighted this one because of the difficulties we have, which this committee is probably faced with. Even the councillors managing this avenue of honour are looking at replacing it and continuing this avenue of honour. Then the question is whether you move those trees back from the clear zone, so that you effectively have one row of trees — the existing ones — and the newly planted ones are behind them, so you start to diminish the value of those trees. What has come through clearly — and that is what we are trying to highlight here — is that the community wants road safety but it also recognises the value and the importance of trees and landscaping.

Mr BISHOP — Are they prepared to pay in their rates for adequate guard rails to be put in place?

Mr RICHARDSON — The question has not been put to them. You would have to say to them that the trees were going to be cut down before they would say yes. They would be prepared to say that it remain as it is, but I am just speculating on that. That leads on to the next point. The new legal environment under the new road management bill is uncertain. If the new guidelines are not realistic and feasible, then they may become a liability against council as the road authority. If we do not recognise that the 20-metre road reserve cannot fit trees in local streets and we have wide clear zones, then council is effectively planting trees in the clear zone of the road reserve, so there are potential liabilities, although there is a strong community push to have those avenue effects — and large trees, not the smaller trees.

Mr BISHOP — On the issue that you are talking about, with the new road management bill, which we will probably debate in this session, is your council in a position to give advice on that — not to this committee, but to the legislators as they go through the bill?
Mr RICHARDSON — The council has made a submission on the new road management bill. I suppose as part of the new road management bill we are preparing road management plans, but the concern would be under the loss and nonfeasance, particularly if you have guidelines. Guidelines become the standard and so it opens up liabilities. But we have not sought legal advice on that question yet, so we are not in a position to advise you.

Mr BISHOP — So your submission is looking for a lead in relation to litigation?

Mr RICHARDSON — Yes, and if guidelines are developed out of this inquiry, they are reasonable and practical and recognise that currently local streets — in the new planned estates, where we have 20-metre and 16-metre road reserves — have trees within the current guidelines of 3 metres off the back of kerb and also recognise that there is value in the existing trees remaining where they are within the clear zones. We would not like to be forced into a position under litigation to have to remove our large avenues.

Mr HARKNESS — How many collisions would you have with roadside objects in residential streets in any case? I guess the other question, while you are thinking of that, is: how many accidents would you have had on the stretch of road to Beaconsfield in the photograph that is figure 5 — just to get an idea, going through the avenue, are people hitting these trees?

Mr HAMILTON — We do not have a breakdown for the number of accidents in the lower speed environments — the 50 kilometres-an-hour environment has not been in long enough yet. Accidents do occur, but I would suggest that the severe accidents that occur in that environment are not vehicles that are doing 50 kilometres an hour; they are vehicles which are exceeding the posted speed limit. As far as the number of accidents in the section where the avenue of honour trees are, I am not aware of any accidents involving the trees to date but the problem is that as soon as an accident does occur someone will say, ‘Why is the tree there?’ This particular avenue has been there for about 90 years. It was planted after World War I to recognise the soldiers. It has very high community value but it is in a position now where traffic volumes over time have increased, and it is in an area where safety is compromised by the trees being there, but to protect the trees is quite expensive as well.

Mr RICHARDSON — That is the completion of our presentation. As I said, the text in italics is contained in our written submission. In conclusion, council’s position is as stated in our written submission. Council strongly supports a reduction in road trauma through sympathetic road environment. The road environment performs many functions, not just the movement of traffic and the value of the other functions need to be recognised. Any new guidelines should recognise existing conditions and the lower speed environments in residential streets.

The CHAIR — Road safety officers are the current flavour. Does the City of Casey employ a road safety officer?

Mr RICHARDSON — Yes, we were probably one of the first municipalities to employ a road safety officer. We have had one for the last three and a half years.

The CHAIR — What types of responsibilities does he or she carry out?

Mr RICHARDSON — He or she is responsible for many of the educational and behavioural aspects of our road safety strategic plan and ultimately it is their responsibility to implement the road safety strategic plan. I suppose you see two engineers here today because we are responsible for the hard physical aspects of the road environment, but we work closely with the road safety officer on those other issues across council.

The CHAIR — Given that you have employed a road safety officer for three years — more years than most councils — how do you measure the effectiveness of that officer?

Mr RICHARDSON — Initially we measured the effectiveness of the officer through the achievements of the road safety strategic plan and the objectives set out in it. The current plan has been going for four or five years now and is due to be reviewed. Anecdotally, there appears to be a lot of community goodwill towards the road safety officer so certain areas of the community are definitely hearing the message of the road safety officer. I think it would be too much to draw a measure of road casualty accidents and the influence of the road safety officer; behavioural issues take a lot longer than educational issues.
The CHAIR — Obviously we have listened to the submissions today. What other road safety issues confront the City of Casey?

Mr RICHARDSON — Overall, I suppose our biggest road safety issues are on the higher speed roads, say the arterial roads. They are not concentrated in any particular area so you cannot easily pick a black spot project to treat them. So generally it is the higher speed areas and the high volume roads — which are the roads reaching capacity — which need overall upgrading, duplication and separation, and also at local intersections. Because of the growth in Casey and the huge growth in the volume of traffic in general, we are now reaching a point where they are becoming saturated which is creating considerable driver frustration and driver frustration means risk-taking behaviour. So there are two problems: drivers are entering high-volume, high-speed streams of traffic in an unsafe situation where they do not really have a gap and force their way in, and also going back through the local network to avoid that. Traffic growth and catering for that growth is one of the biggest traffic safety impacts on the City of Casey.

Mr BISHOP — We have talked a fair bit about trees. What about utility poles?

Mr RICHARDSON — We face the same situation with our utility poles, particularly street lighting in local streets which has to go close to the kerb, as you can see from some of the photos. They are non-frangible. If you look at figure 3 on page 4 you will see the non-standard street lighting that goes right throughout our subdivisions. They provide an amenity for the area but they are also within the clear zone and you would either have to go to the high-cost frangible ones which do not have the same appearance or move the large poles. So again, in the lower 50 kilometres an hour speed zones, street lighting is within the clear zones.

Mr HAMILTON — Within the City of Casey we have new developments occurring, which this picture reflects. We also have areas that have been around since Doveton was developed through the 1950s. Some of the areas around Berwick have been around for 100 years so it is a mixture of an above-ground and below-ground power situation. In the old, established areas it is above-ground power and those poles are quite substantial. If you hit them, obviously the car or the motorist comes off second best. All the new estates are going in with underground power. The standard lighting fixtures that are going in there are sympathetic if a car hits them. It is basically just a small light and pole and they tend to collapse. Certainly in the established areas there is above ground power and they are quite heavy poles. We have areas in Endeavour Hills which have concrete lighting poles that went in because they are quite wide streets. If they require changes then we go with a slip-based ring impact absorbent pole as an alternative, but there is a lot of existing infrastructure out there which is quite substantial if you hit it.

Mr EREN — Who covers the cost of that?

Mr HAMILTON — If we are relocating or changing a service, then we would pay that cost. We had a situation in recent times where a concrete pole was hit by a motorist resulting in a fatality. My understanding is that the motorist was probably travelling at twice the speed limit at the time, if not more. We arranged with the power company to have an impact-absorbing pole go in. It was initially going to charge us for that change instead of a concrete pole because concrete was its standard. We put an argument to the company that if it was doing work as a replacement for a pole that it should be putting in something that was more sensitive to the road design and in that case that was the end of it, but at one stage it was going to charge us for changing the pole to something that was more sensitive to the road.

Mr HARKNESS — I have noticed in Frankston and as I travel down to Cranbourne now and again that on the Cranbourne Road as you get towards Cranbourne there are a lot of new estates going in there and I assume that is happening throughout your entire municipality. What happens when you have an 80 kilometres-an-hour or a 100 kilometres-an-hour road that has been there for a long time and has gravel shoulders? When a new housing estate goes in what process is involved in making sure there are adequate entrances to the new estate, and who is responsible for all of that?

Mr HAMILTON — That is assessed as part of the planning approval process. The question came up before as to where the accident areas were or which areas are of concern for Casey. Most of our accidents are occurring on the arterials. Those arterials are gradually being upgraded. It is a matter of a combination of timing and available funds. Quite a lot of our roads are old rural roads, so they are in a 20-metre reservation and probably have 7-metre sealed gravel shoulders. But they are operating as an urban arterial. They are carrying volumes that
are getting up to 20 000 vehicles a day, so they are getting right up to the top end of their capacity. As estates are planned, with access points to those roads, then we assess what is the appropriate treatment. Either the council or VicRoads do that, depending on whether it is a declared main road, state highway or a road under council’s control. There are usually planning conditions placed and appropriate turn lanes are incorporated into that or traffic lights are provided, depending on the volumes.

**Mr HARKNESS** — As part of that planning process, is your road safety officer involved in highlighting some of the non-engineering components of road safety?

**Mr HAMILTON** — The road safety officer is not directly involved in doing the planning assessments. The role of the road safety officer at Casey is more of liaising with the community and interacting with the schools — it is more an education and awareness role. The actual assessment of the physical infrastructure is carried out through the traffic engineers feeding back through to the planners.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Paul and David, for your input today. As I said, we have taken a transcript and will provide the City of Casey with a copy of the transcript in due course. We appreciate your input and time today.

**Witnesses withdrew.**
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Inquiry into Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Rosebud–1 March 2004

Members

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

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

Staff

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

 Witnesses

Mr M. Fleming, Manager, Engineering Services, Cardinia Shire Council; and
Sergeant P. McGavigan, Casey Traffic Management Unit, Victoria Police, Roadsafe Outer South East.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome back, Mark, with another hat on, and Sergeant Patrick McGavigan. We are taking a transcript and a copy of that transcript will be provided to your council in due course. We are also operating under parliamentary privilege, so what you say today cannot be held against you legally in the future. We look forward to hearing your submission.

Mr FLEMING — Thanks very much. As you mentioned, I have my Roadsafe Outer South East badge on this afternoon. Roadsafe Outer South East (ROSE) is made up of three municipalities, which are Casey, Cardinia and Greater Dandenong. Members of the council are community members, and members from each of those municipalities, the police force, the Country Fire Authority, and VicRoads, of course. What we have put together here is a submission which goes into some detail of statistics and that type of thing for all three of the municipalities which ROSE covers. I will go through some of those now. The first table is a breakdown of the ages of all the residents of those municipalities. What it shows is that overall it is a very young population, with 23 per cent in the 35 to 49 age group — notice I did not call that age group middle-aged.

The CHAIR — We noted that. Well done.

Mr FLEMING — The following table shows the backgrounds of people in those municipalities. It shows that Dandenong has residents with multicultural backgrounds, but in the municipalities of Casey and Cardinia the residents are of a predominantly Australian background.

One of the important things in this area is the rural–urban interface, which affects the population in the growth corridors which are right on the boundary of the rural areas. As it says there, the challenge is to ensure that the infrastructure in place is able to cater for users, as the area shifts from a rural to an urban approach.

I should note that all these statistics have been taken from the VicRoads Crash Stats database. The first graph shows the number of fatalities across all three of the councils. The dark colour shows the total number in the rural areas of those three councils. As you can see, a significant percentage of the total number of fatalities is in the rural areas.

The second graph is similar but it shows serious injuries as well as fatalities. It shows that in the rural areas, for drivers at least, the number of serious injuries is a bit lower, comparatively.

Mr EREN — What do you think that means? In terms of collisions, does it mean that roadside objects are more prevalent in rural areas?

Sgt McGAVIGAN — One of the problems in the rural areas is that there is a lot less run-off on the older roads, so if you run off you have a hard area to hit at higher speeds — the rural roads have a higher speed limit — and there is more chance of injury.

Mr FLEMING — If you have a look at just the drivers, it shows that fatalities in rural areas make up 50 per cent of all the fatalities, but for serious injuries in rural areas it shows only 24 per cent or 25 per cent, or something like that. I think what that shows is that in rural areas the crashes are more severe and fatalities are more likely. There are a number of other statistics there which I will just go through.

The following table talks about the types of crashes. I should say that I have not gone through a lot of these statistics in great detail, but I am familiar with them as a general rule. It shows collisions with vehicles making up 53 per cent of crashes across the municipality, and 45 per cent in rural areas. This table reflects the same type of thing that the previous graph shows. It shows the high severity in rural areas when crashes occur. Collisions with vehicles are obviously the most predominant type of crash across the municipalities and collisions with a fixed object are the second most likely type of crash. You can probably take yourselves through the next table which is a similar type of table to the first one.

Mr BISHOP — Mark, do you get these statistics from VicRoads or from the police? How does it arrive?

Mr FLEMING — They are taken from the VicRoads crash statistics database.
Mr BISHOP — So there is good cooperation and communication between the organisations and your road safety committee?

Mr FLEMING — Yes, there is. In fact that is one of the biggest benefits of our road safety committee. We meet monthly and we have an opportunity to talk to all the different agencies. We also have the CFA who tell us about their experiences with responses and that type of thing as well.

Mr BISHOP — Is the SES on your committee as well?

Mr FLEMING — No, not currently, but there is no particular reason for that. We just do not have representation from it. I will not go through it in any great detail but there are a number of other graphs there that talk about the types of crashes and where they occur. The next one is of interest I suppose. That last graph looks at the number of crashes in the different speeds zones, and I think that is an important thing to look at. It shows that there are a high number of crashes across the municipality in the 60 kilometre-an-hour speed zone, and a very low percentage in rural areas. I guess that is to be expected because there are very few 60 kilometre-an-hour speed zones in rural areas.

The CHAIR — So it actually reflects that there are very few 60 kilometre-an-hour zones in rural areas?

Mr FLEMING — Yes, that is what you would interpret from that and vice versa; there are very few 100 kilometre-an-hour zones in the urban areas.

Mr HARKNESS — There were about 150 serious casualty crashes in a 50 kilometre-an-hour speed zone. Would they be vehicles travelling far in excess of that speed in those zones?

Mr FLEMING — It is impossible to tell from the Vicroads statistics. One problem with the Vicroads database is that it does not tell us anything about driver behaviour at the time of the crash, so it only tells us about the physical condition of the roads. It can tell us about the weather conditions but it does not tell us if the driver was speeding or drunk or whatever.

Mr BISHOP — That is a good point.

Mr FLEMING — Although the police have a bit more insight into that and that is one of the reasons we go through those joint inspections when we have fatalities, at least in Cardinia, and I know that Casey is doing the same thing.

The rest of the submission goes through a number of the issues, and I will try and go through them fairly quickly. The first key issue that we will touch on is road user issues. We will follow that with behavioural issues and then infrastructure-type issues.

On road user issues, as we said before there are a number of young drivers in all three of the municipalities and young drivers make up 26 per cent of fatal crashes, which is a disproportionate number of fatalities compared to the number of young drivers on our roads. Roadsafe Outer South East, in conjunction with the CFA, has developed the Fit to Drive program, which is a program to be delivered through schools. It incorporates the RAAP which is a CFA program from Queensland — it means road accident awareness program. We deliver the program through three levels of high school — in years 10, 11 and 12. In year 10 we deliver a standard Vicroads Keys Please program. In year 11 we go into the school, cut up a car and talk about the consequences of crashes and the consequences of risk-taking behaviour. In year 12 we go through a video and some other information on muck-up day and drink-driving and other risky behaviour.

Mr BISHOP — Have you any views on driver training in schools?

Mr FLEMING — Yes. As part of the Fit to Drive model we are trying to incorporate drivers schools into that program and perhaps some prizes and free lessons and what have you. But I think a full driver training program might be useful and could be incorporated in the Fit to Drive program, but we have not had the ability to do that at this stage.

Sgt McGAVIGAN — It is very hard to get it into the school curriculum as well. We are already crunched for time to do the things we are already doing, but to get even more — we would be hitting higher hurdles in the education department. It is a great idea but it is where the priorities are in the education system.
Mr FLEMING — Just to get half a day in the year 11 curriculum is very difficult.

Mr BISHOP — Thank you.

Mr FLEMING — High-powered vehicles are an issue that relate to young drivers as well and Roadsafe would like to see the requirements tightened for young drivers driving such vehicles so they are enforceable. One of the problems that we see, and we have discussed it in our road safety council, is the power-to-weight ratio requirements. That is something on which Pat might be able to add something.

Sgt McGAVIGAN — We have an offence of a P-plater driving a high-powered vehicle but you have to get a certificate from Vicroads to say that the vehicle is a high-powered vehicle. There is a bit of an anomaly at the moment, and it is extremely difficult to get one from Vicroads. It says, ‘How do we know that that vehicle has not been changed in any way so that it is a high-powered vehicle?’ There is no black and white line that says, ‘Yes, you can drive that’ or ‘No, you cannot drive that’ because it is worked out on a power-to-weight formula. Some of the smaller cars have far greater outputs than the bigger cars.

The CHAIR — Absolutely.

Mr FLEMING — Other road user issues are motorcyclists. Rural motorcyclists account for approximately half of our municipality’s fatalities and serious injuries. That is partly due to our winding roads and those types of things. In conjunction with Vicroads the Shire of Cardinia has addressed that issue in the last 12 months, mapping serious injuries and fatal crashes and auditing them with a motorcycle auditor. Obviously we would like that to continue. Part of the problem with motorcyclists is the lack of reporting of crashes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the problem may be greater in the area than first thought. A lot of motorcycle riders will crash but not report the incident.

On the issue of tourist routes, municipalities in the outer south east area host the Dandenong Market, Gumbaya Park and Puffing Billy and are the gateway to the Mornington Peninsula and Gippsland’s Phillip Island and Wilsons Promontory. As a result, we are targeting fatigue and alcohol playing a role in and are trying to minimise the tourist road toll for our areas. Both of those issues are covered in greater detail in the submission.

The next area that we want to touch on is behavioural issues and obviously speeding is one of the most important ones. It is one of the biggest problems in our area. Driving above the posted speed limits is a problem and is obviously a major cause of crashes and also the severity of those crashes.

Two types of speeding issues arise. The first is anecdotal reporting of high-level speeding, such as drag racing. This issue is addressed at a regional statewide level by Victoria Police. There is also a seasonal problem, which is targeted as required.

Low-level speeding is currently being targeted at a statewide level by the Transport Accident Commission, Vicroads, Victoria Police and the Department of Justice. Locally, municipalities, Victoria Police and the Roadsafe council are using speed trailers and enforcement in a partnership. It involves the distribution of brochures and publicity on speeding issues in the local area where speed trailers are used and enforcement in the area later. This is part of the Vicroads Safer Roads initiative. All three councils within the Roadsafe area have speed trailers now. The purchase of those was supported financially by Roadsafe Outer South East and Vicroads. Those are now being put to use.

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — This low-level ‘Not so fast’ program is working well. The trailer is put out in the local area and the people are given a few days or a week to get used to it and then we move in and do enforcement in the vicinity of it and target those people who are ignoring the messages given across to the community. So they have had the chance before the enforcement starts.

Mr BISHOP — The feedback on that is good, is it, particularly in areas where you are getting three speed changes through the area?

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — That targets the low-level speed area, that one, and concentrates on an area at a time, moving on from there. But the feedback is positive, that people like to see the trailer there and then like the follow up, especially the locals.
Mr BISHOP — What is your definition of ‘low-level speeding’ and ‘high-level speeding’? Is that kilometres per hour or lower speeds?

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — I think where we are coming from in this article is the lower speed zones and the higher speed zones. The high-level speeding can be anywhere on the highways, anywhere from the 80s up, things like that.

Mr BISHOP — I thought it might have been that 10 kilometres an hour might be low level and 20 kilometres an hour or 30 kilometres an hour over might be high level. I did not understand your definition.

Mr HARKNESS — With the speed trailers, do you put them in only 50 kilometre-per-hour and 60 kilometre-per-hour zones?

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — Yes.

Mr HARKNESS — You have three municipalities that you cover. How many of the trailers have you got?

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — One in each municipality.

Mr FLEMING — Certainly Casey is looking at purchasing another one at the moment.

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — Do you understand the speed trailers, that they go up to only a certain speed and then just show ‘too fast’; they do not display the speed for people?

Mr BISHOP — Why do they not do that, because I might want to check my speedometer?

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — At what? Not in that zone, you should not. If you want to check it in a 100-kilometres-an-hour zone, they still have them on roads such as the Geelong Road, where they have the overhead one. I do not think there are any on this side of town, though, in relation to that. Maybe it is something we can look at in the future.

Mr BISHOP — I could have checked my speed at a lower speed, of course.

Mr FLEMING — It will give you that speed at a lower speed.

Mr BISHOP — I know that.

Mr FLEMING — Fatigue is another behavioural issue and those crashes are traditionally categorised by the time of day the crashes occur. As we all know, fatigue can be treated only by sleep.

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — From our point of view, it is very hard to enforce fatigue. You can enforce speed and alcohol, but how do you know when a person is tired? That is the hardest bit of enforcement.

Mr FLEMING — Most people do not consider it to be against the law to be driving when they are tired, either. ROSE has supported the provision of additional rest areas for the Gumbaya Park and Brewer Road rest area, which is the one on the Princes Highway at Tynong. Consideration needs to be given to the recent research relating to rest areas, which indicates that visitors are cautious about using rest areas and would prefer to use service centres. Service centres containing a restaurant and service station are perceived to be safer than rest areas, as per the report of the RACV on the public perception of rest areas. At the moment there is a service area on the Princes Highway at Nar Nar Goon. However, when the Pakenham bypass is completed it is unlikely that that service area will remain, so there will be no service area on the Melbourne-bound lane within the Cardinia shire and all the way into Melbourne.

Drink-driving obviously remains an issue for the community. ROSE supports the messages of responsible alcohol serving and not drink-driving and we do that by the program ‘Looking after our mates’, which is a drink-driving program. In conjunction with the Victorian Country Football League we put that out to the sports clubs, given that they are a major server of alcohol in our areas. ‘Looking after our mates’ is a Roadsafe Victoria initiative that approaches the issue of drink-driving and gives suggested solutions to hosts about responsible serving and hosting a safe party. It talks about standard drink measures and is a bit of a fund for the clubs as well, I suppose.
The other issue that we wanted to touch on is infrastructure. The term ‘clear zone’ refers to the distance that is clear from the edge of the road to the nearest obstacle. The current guidelines on high-speed roads state that the clear zone is 9 metres. Anecdotally there are several roads that do not currently meet this requirement. I would probably go as far as to say I cannot think of any roads that meet that requirement. ROSE advocates that clear zone guidelines be implemented for high-speed roads.

ROSE supports the use of barrier systems to prevent cross-median crashes and run-off road crashes into fixed objects. Pat can give you an anecdote of a very recent crash.

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — Last week I was on the Channel 7 news because just after a very heavy rain downfall the driver of a car, a Nissan 300ZX, lost control. He was going straight across towards the middle, hit the wire rope barrier, that stopped it passing onto the busy outbound lanes of the Monash Freeway, and it saved a multiple collision injury and the guy got out and walked away, purely because of those wire rope barriers.

Mr FLEMING — So they do work.

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — On the flip side, on another day we had a car go off the road to the left and, because there was no protection around an overhead gantry, the driver is now in the Alfred in a critical condition still — it is touch and go whether he lives — because the driver’s side impacted an overhead gantry which was about 6 metres off the road and there was no protection around it. He took it straight on the driver’s side door and the impact speed was put down to about 60 kilometres an hour at impact — and that is after braking and slowing, so it is still massive. Without sounding too gruesome, the safety handle on the driver’s side of his car exploded in his eye, so he has lost the sight in that eye now. That was all from that one impact. They are two different examples of collisions, one where the safety things implemented have saved the driver and one where safety features have not been implemented and he was critically airlifted to the Alfred and whether he lives or dies is still in the balance.

Mr FLEMING — We talk about road shoulders on our rural roads. One of the issues here is the sealing of those road shoulders. That allows adequate time for the driver of a vehicle that does happen to run off the road to either regain control of the vehicle or, obviously, not lose control in the first place.

Sgt Mc GAVIGAN — There was a fatality in Casey last year. The person was travelling down the South Gippsland Highway, left the shoulder of the road and just basically after the gravel shoulder he went up an embankment, hit a tree, the car flipped over and the passenger in the vehicle was killed, purely because there was no run-off, no time to recover, after he had left the road surface.

Mr FLEMING — We touch on gravel roads, just stating that they do contribute to the country road toll. ROSE strongly recommends that the default speed limit on these types of roads be reduced. Gravel surfaces also require high maintenance levels, with grading and dust suppressing.

ROSE recommends that a review of speed limit guidelines occur for all Victorian roads. In particular, it is recommended that the 110-kilometres-an-hour stretches of Princes Highway East be reduced to 100 kilometres an hour due to the number of intersecting roads and the traffic volumes. It is also recommended that the speed limit on gravel roads like the one pictured be reduced to 80 kilometres an hour. The road pictured is a local rural arterial road. It is very windy, with a narrow pavement, no clear zones, no run-off areas and in fact not even any shoulders. Given it is unsealed it is very hard to delineate except with guide posts. Currently the speed limit is 100 kilometres an hour on that road and there are certainly a number of vehicles that do their best to reach that 100 kilometres an hour.

Emergency services response time is something we would like to mention as well. Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia comprise a very large area and there are delays in response times to crashes. Our emergency services people talk about the golden hour in terms of response time and the distances that need to be travelled obviously impact on that golden hour opportunity. I do not really know what the recommendation is there but it is certainly an issue for us.

Sgt McGAVIGAN — If there is a serious collision and it is past Berwick then the helicopter airlifts them to the Alfred hospital virtually every time because it takes too long by road.

Mr FLEMING — To sum up, Roadsafe Outer South East would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on the rural road toll and roadside objects. While many of our ideas are expensive to implement,
treatments like the infrastructure improvements featured in our submission have made a vast improvement to congestion and safety. It may be that further investment needs to be made to the road infrastructure and legislation, supported by behavioural and educational change and enforcement to make the road environment safer and therefore save costs to the community in the long run.

We hope that you will consider our issues and ideas and make the right decisions that will benefit our community.

Sgt McGAVIGAN — That example I gave you about the wire rope barrier, I have been with the traffic unit in Dandenong for five years now and a couple of years ago before the government implemented it we had a number of crashes where they crossed over and there were serious injuries. But as I said, with this one the other night the car was virtually ripped apart from panel to panel but no-one was seriously injured and that is the big difference. While the expense is great in the short term, in the long term it saves far more.

The CHAIR — We have seen the benefits locally in Geelong along the new Geelong Road. That was another example of what you referred to before as an unprotected road?

Sgt McGAVIGAN — Yes.

Mr FLEMING — If you have any questions we would be happy to answer them.

The CHAIR — Any questions?

Mr BISHOP — I asked mine as we went along, thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned.