ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll
Shepparton – 18 February 2004

Members

Mr B. W. Bishop  Mr T. W. Mulder
Mr J. H. Eren  Mr E. G. Stoney
Mr A. R. Harkness  Mr I. D. Trezise
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Chair: Mr I. D. Trezise
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Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officer: Mr P. Nelson

Witness

Mr K. Jones, Manager, Design Service, City of Greater Shepparton.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The DEPUTY CHAIR — Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for attending. This is the all-party parliamentary Road Safety Committee and we are here in Shepparton inquiring into crashes involving roadside objects and, coupled with that, an inquiry into the country road toll, which I know is very concerning to everybody.

You are being recorded here this morning to assist us with our transcript and also to assist in the intent of what is being said. You are covered by parliamentary privilege in this room, and we encourage people to really speak their mind because that helps us carry out our function. You are not covered by parliamentary privilege if you say the same outside. I do not think anything that will be said here will be too controversial, but sometimes things come up. We are very informal. We like to have a conversation and draw out the real issues, which is why we are here. This committee has had a long history of inquiries that have assisted in road safety, like crash helmets, seat belts and things like that.

For the record, could you state your full name and position, and so we have it on record the boundaries and geographical position of Shepparton and some of the issues, and then go into your submission.

Mr JONES — I am Kevin Jones. I am manager, design service for the City of Greater Shepparton. In our submission I have a background outline of the City of Greater Shepparton. It has a population of some 60 000. In front of you, you will have a map there, and you will see the townships. Shepparton is the major town within the municipality. Mooroopna, Tatura, Murchison, Dookie and Merrigum are the other smaller towns within our municipality. The southern boundary is just south of Murchison and we go to just north of Tallygaroopna. You will see on the map where the boundaries of our municipality are.

Just skimming through some of the background information that is in the submission, the City of Greater Shepparton is known as the Australian fruit bowl. As you all are well aware, we have quite a large dairy industry. Fruit production is well known throughout our area, and it is also known as the transport hub of eastern Australia. That is really generated by the need for supporting the production levels that come from all those industries, and that is increasing as the irrigation and agricultural pursuits expand within our municipality.

As to the road network, you will see by the map that we have very much a grid system within our municipality — a closely spaced local road system. We have 2400-plus kilometres of local roads. We have two highways that traverse our municipality. The Goulburn Valley Highway is a national highway, and it provides the major link through to Brisbane from Melbourne.

Mr EREN — How much gravel road was that?

Mr JONES — I have not indicated the amount of gravel road, but we 2448 kilometres of local roads. I do not have figures on what percentages are gravel and what are sealed. The map shows what parts of the network are gravelled and sealed, and I can certainly provide information if you wish.

As well as the national highway that runs through the centre of the municipality we have the Midland Highway, a state highway, and it goes through the centre of Shepparton and is the major link to Bendigo and Benalla.

We have recently adopted the Greater Shepparton road safety plan, a copy of which I have provided for the committee. This plan has resulted from reviewing accident statistics and extensive stakeholder consultations. The actions contained in the plan reflect the concerns of stakeholder organisations and individuals in the community. The plan contains 47 actions, 15 of which have been initiated and are ongoing.

The council has a strong partnership with the Goulburn Valley Community Road Safety Council, which has prime responsibility for nine of these actions in our road safety plan. Our partnership with the Goulburn Valley road safety council has been there for a long time — since the 1970s. We have always had strong representation there and always supported that organisation.

Our response to the terms of reference as to the country road toll will address part (b), the role of the road and roadside environment in causation and severity of crashes. In regard to crashes involving roadside objects, our submission will address parts (a) and (c). The council acknowledges that the Goulburn Valley road safety council submission will address other parts of the terms of reference.
I have provided the accident history involving collisions with roadside objects. The table there shows those figures for the period 1999 to 2003. In that time there were 208 casualty accidents involving collisions with roadside objects. When we analysed those crashes, we found that 41 per cent of those crashes involved a tree or trees on the roadside.

In addition, four involved roadside structures. I just want to highlight to you our concerns relating to both the issue of trees and the road environment and also road structures, and particularly Goulburn-Murray Water structures which are a unique part of our road environment.

Throughout the rural road network the road reserve accommodates both a carriageway for vehicles and native vegetation, and the community expects the council to both maintain the road reserve as a safe environment for vehicles and as a corridor for native vegetation. The council adopted a roadside management plan in 2001 which identifies over 536 kilometres of road reserve with native vegetation of high conservation value. The Greater Shepparton road safety plan, action 12, has given council the task of reviewing both its road construction standards and roadside management plan ‘to ensure that an appropriate balance between safety and biodiversity concerns is achieved when the two sets of values are in conflict’.

Recommendations 29 and 30 of the 2002 inquiry into rural road safety and infrastructure recognised the need for this. Specifically, it asked for ‘projects be trialled by Vicroads to show the effectiveness of using the best roadside safety management practices’.

Council seeks assistance to meet the challenge of maintaining a safe road environment while preserving the biodiversity within the road reserve. It is believed that Vicroads should be strongly encouraged to implement recommendations 29 and 30 of the 2002 inquiry and review and expand *Vicroads Road Design Guidelines*, part 3, section 3.9, in relation to clear zone requirements for roadsides of high conservation value with the aim of ensuring that clear zone standards also meet community and environmental expectations in high conservation areas.

In my role as engineer I have had quite a bit of discussion with road safety engineers about the appropriateness of the clear zones that specific roads have in their guidelines. I think that those who have read that section will note that there is only one paragraph that refers to environmental considerations and clear zones, and really from a community point of view we need more than that to be able to assess and appropriately deal with how we manage the safety of the vehicle in the road environment and yet still maintain trees and other native vegetation which provides the unique biodiversity. I know much discussion goes on in council offices now about retaining the native vegetation in our environment because a lot of species only exist within the corridor provided by the road reserve, and it is increasingly a concern to council. It is a concern because we are retaining trees that are inside the clear zone but we cannot afford to provide protection for those trees along the whole of the corridor. So there is the issue of future liability for the road authorities — council and Vicroads. I know this is going to be partly addressed in the new road management bill but I still think that councils — and particularly people like myself who have to make decisions in that area — need more research and guidelines to know how to best deal with that issue.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR** — I can see that is obviously the main part of your submission. Perhaps we could just draw that out a little bit while we are on it. I noticed that you said that council needs assistance to meet the challenge of maintaining a safe road environment while preserving the biodiversity within the road reserve. Where do you think the assistance should come from, what type of assistance should it be and how should council’s needs be met?

**Mr JONES** — As was highlighted in the previous inquiry, that if Vicroads were able to undertake trials to show what the best roadside safety management practices were and have some good research on where protection should be provided within the environment close to the carriageway. The feedback I have from Vicroads personnel about the current widths that are provided within the guidelines is that they were developed as a result of research done in the United States of America back in the 1960s and 1970s and adapted for Australia. Nothing has been done that I am aware of in Australia to see whether they should be modified. That question is always a concern, particularly where within our rural areas our road reserve widths just do not allow us to provide the sort of clear zone widths that we are able to provide here.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR** — What about the policy of DSE and the removal of trees? Have you had difficulties there? How can that be improved so that we can have both been nice biodiversity and safer roads.
Mr JONES — We are conscious of the fact that we need to go through the planning process when we identify a tree within the road environment to be removed. It is referred to DSE, and we go through discussions to get agreement about the need for the removal of a tree or trees. At the moment we avoid that at all costs and we look at engineering ways of getting around that issue or removing the tree.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — So you avoid it to try to maintain the biodiversity or because it is so difficult to obtain permission?

Mr JONES — No, when I say, ‘Avoid it’, I mean that before we apply for a planning permit to remove a tree we look at every possible way of changing engineering standards to comply with the clear zone requirements. It varies from case to case, but there are instances where we have ended up retaining trees within the clear zone because we believe that the impact was unacceptable on the environment.

Mr BISHOP — Kevin, I thought I read somewhere there is a code of practice in relation to roadside objects. You are very much aiming at VicRoads, unless I got it wrong; I would have thought that the local community, and therefore the council, would have a better understanding of your road system in relation to crashes that occur. You said that you have good statistics here. Do you have a statistical database between yourself, the police and VicRoads to give you an idea that a particular situation is a problem?

Mr JONES — The database is not detailed enough. The table I provided comes from the VicRoads database and it has a description of the object, but it is just a generic description. I understand that if we had access to the police report we may be able to identify which particular obstacle it was, but it generally just states a generic term regarding a tree or other object. Sometimes it is a guardrail or some other description that the police have given to it.

Mr BISHOP — Does the council conduct an audit in relation to the roadsides in relation to safety, danger and future risks?

Mr JONES — We undertake safety audits where we are going to do new works, usually at the design stage. One of the actions under our council’s road safety plan is that we undertake road safety audits for projects exceeding $40 000. Road safety audits have been undertaken in more recent times to deal with these issues at the design stage, but we also do it at the pre-opening stage.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Does council automatically get a report if there is a fatal accident on one of the roads under your control from the police and/or VicRoads with any recommendations about action or identifying that this tree has had three accidents in four years, or do you have to go looking for that information to keep your records up to date?

Mr JONES — We have to research that ourselves. The one exception is where there has been a fatality on a declared road, VicRoads always prepares a report on that in conjunction with the police. Usually that gets discussed at our traffic liaison committee. Shepparton has a traffic liaison committee, which is a technical committee, where we meet with council officers, the police and roads officers on a quarterly basis.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — For the record, could you just explain what is a declared road?

Mr JONES — Arterial roads which VicRoads has responsibility for finally.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Are declared roads roads that the council looks after as well?

Mr JONES — That is right. Council is responsible for the maintenance of those roads.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — But it is a VicRoads road?

Mr JONES — Yes. The definition of that is a bit of a grey one, but the new road management bill certainly puts it squarely within VicRoad’s responsibility.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — So with local roads you do not even get that advice that you get when it is a declared road?

Mr JONES — No. Anything to do with local roads, we need to do the research and make the assessment.
The DEPUTY CHAIR — Do you see that as a bit of a hole in the system or an anomaly?

Mr JONES — We have access to that data. It is just a matter of resources to be able to continually monitor that and assess where we need to instigate remedial works to improve the safety. With the recent black spot program the government had, there was a lot of work done to identify projects, and there was a fair bit of a research done to support our submissions for money for treatments in that time. We have done a fair bit within our local road system, but it is all a matter of resources as to how much time you can spend to identify where all these problem areas are.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I am suggesting that if the police and Vicroads do things with declared roads, would it not be of assistance if they expanded that to assist councils with all roads?

Mr JONES — Certainly if on a statewide basis that were available that would be certainly a great support to councils, yes.

Mr HARKNESS — Several councils around the state have introduced road safety officers. I am wondering whether Shepparton has one or is considering one, but also what sort of promotional or other programs are you implementing to deal with drugs, fatigue and alcohol?

Mr JONES — We do not have a road safety officer. The Goulburn Valley Community Road Safety Council has a road safety officer. They undertake a lot of behavioural and educational programs. We partner them with that. They are the ones who are driving most of those programs. We have a close relationship with them and support their programs. Nevertheless, in our road safety plan those programs are highlighted there. If you get a chance to read it you will see we have nominated a primary responsible authority and a support authority. As to those nine actions I referred to as Goulburn Valley road safety council actions, they are the prime authority for conducting those programs or implementing those actions.

The second part of the submission is addressing road structures. The matter of road bridges over natural streams is not a major issue in the Greater Shepparton area. However, the irrigation of farmland together with the grid of closely spaced roads has resulted in the erection of many road crossings. In the case of Greater Shepparton there are over 250 road, channel and drainage crossings maintained by Goulburn-Murray Water. The narrowness and nature of edge structures location and elevation of the structures create road safety hazards which are unique to the irrigated rural regions of the state. Adequate protection of vehicles colliding with these structures was partly addressed by the statewide black spot end post protection program. Some 25 per cent of the irrigation structures on arterial roads were provided with guardrail protection or widened outside the clear zone. You will see by some of our photos the situation with those structures.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Did Goulburn-Murray Water contribute at all to upgrading those protections?

Mr JONES — I cannot accurately answer that. My understanding — and I will stand to be corrected here — is that the funding was basically provided from the black spot program, but what I think was happening when these treatments were undertaken was that Goulburn-Murray Water undertook extra works at their cost at the same time in regard to upgrading their structures, but I do not have the information to be clear about that.

Mr BISHOP — With the sunsetting of nonfeasance in the middle of this year when the road management bill comes into play — or that is proposed, anyway — do you have any idea of the responsibility level in relation to those bridge crossings and who will pick that up in your research in relation to the road management bill?

Mr JONES — Our understanding at the moment from the workshops I have been to is that Vicroads has already declared that it will be responsible for all structures on roads, and in fact will take over responsibility of the Goulburn-Murray Water structures. I do not know how well that has been established or whether Vicroads has identified exactly what the extent of that liability is, but that is how the road management bill apparently reads at the moment. As far as councils are concerned, it has been our advice that it will be subject to agreement between the road authority and the water authority as to where the demarcation responsibility will reside in the future in regard to those structures.

Mr BISHOP — And have you discussed trees in your — —
Mr JONES — No, that is unclear to me at the moment. I do not believe it is clear as to where that responsibility lies.

Mr BISHOP — What about power poles — same thing?

Mr JONES — Same thing. I will finish off by saying that in regard to Goulburn-Murray Water structures, that we believe a further program supported by the state, the water industry and local government needs to be developed to reduce the hazards created by the remaining irrigation structures within the clear zone. Many of these structures do have some sort of railing, but a lot of them are substandard and do not meet the current standards. It is really a matter of bringing them all up to current standards in regard to protection of those structures.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — We have a few minutes. Perhaps you could give the committee an outline of the bypass, the mythical bypass — where it is going to go and where it links back onto the road — and perhaps tell the committee where the traffic goes from here, which is a long way.

Mr JONES — Yes. I do not have a plan with me. The bypass is to bypass Shepparton to the west of Mooroopna. It is going to deviate off the existing Goulburn Valley Highway corridor near Arcadia, at the southern end, and go across the Goulburn River close to Toolamba and then round to Mooroopna, near Excelsor Avenue. I am too sure whether that is on your map there — the terminal road area — and then comes back and joins the Goulburn Valley Highway just north of Shepparton, just prior to Congupna; so that is the route.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — What is the approximate length of it?

Mr JONES — There are probably other people who possibly know approximately what that length is.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I am quite happy for someone to tell Kevin. It is a very big project.

Mr JONES — Yes, we talking about something like 20 to 30 kilometres. [The length is 36km]

The DEPUTY CHAIR — How urgent is that in relation to traffic congestion and accidents? I understand a lot of this traffic goes to Brisbane up the Newell Highway.

Mr JONES — It is extremely urgent from my personal point of view. We have established an alternative truck bypass which goes to the east. We have significant safety problems on that route at the moment because the increase in heavy vehicle traffic, for which it was intended to be used, is quickly going to exceed the capacity of that route if the bypass is not in place in the foreseeable future. It takes 60 per cent of the heavy vehicles at the moment, and it is increasing. Very little of the heavy traffic goes through the centre of Shepparton; it uses that bypass. So that is where it is at the moment.

Mr LANGDON — What is the estimated cost of the bypass?

Mr JONES — I have not got those figures off the top of my head; I have not prepared the figures.

Mr BISHOP — Kevin, while we are talking about road safety, there has been a bit of media coverage about the causeway. Can you give us some idea of that and its history?

Mr JONES — It has been of concern to council for quite some time with regard to its capacity to handle the traffic —

Mr BISHOP — The Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway, I should say.

Mr JONES — Yes, around 27,000 vehicles a day use the causeway. At times the traffic is very heavy. The real issue is the fact that the four lanes on the causeway are significantly below standard and the bridges are narrow, which means that if you have several trucks passing together at a bridge it is very hazardous. I suppose that my personal observation of the accident history is that we are very lucky that there has not been a major accident there. There have been a number of accidents but not of such great significance that it would really put on a lot of pressure. But from a community point of view, the main concern is that when there is an accident there is nowhere else for traffic to go. There is a back road where only a few weekends ago when there was an accident early in the morning and the road was closed until 1 o’clock the next day. When the road was closed the traffic tried to use the back road and it took over three quarters of an hour to get between Shepparton and Maroopa at one stage.
Mr BISHOP — Are there any plans to do anything with that particular roadway?

Mr JONES — Yes, a study has been undertaken by Vicroads. It has been submitted for funding through the Vicroads program for the last two or three years but it has been unsuccessful in attracting funding at this stage.

Interjection from audience.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — The question to Kevin from the gallery was, ‘Why was the causeway closed for 12 hours?’. He may not know.

Mr JONES — I do not know. It was obviously something that the police had to do to sort out — -

Interjection from audience.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — It is not usual to take questions or debate from the floor. I will take one just because I have already taken one, and I will repeat it for the record. There was a comment that the road need not have been closed for that long, and that there might have been a bit of overkill, but we may perhaps ask the police when we are interviewing them what they think about that. Thank you, we will not take any more comments from the floor.

Mr LANGDON — The black spot funding and the Roads to Recovery Program: obviously the photographs indicated that both are increasing. What is your opinion of both?

Mr JONES — I am quite familiar with the black spot program but not so familiar with the other program. The black spot program was an excellent program for us to identify and catch up on some real concerns we had throughout our network. We benefited quite extensively from that program, and I believe the accident records will reflect that in the future because a large percentage of our black spots were addressed under that program. It was an excellent program.

Mr EREN — Kevin, I am looking at some statistics from the calendar year 2002. There were some 50 fatalities that occurred in Shepparton and surrounding councils and 393 serious injuries. Do you have a breakdown of how many of those may have occurred on unsealed roads?

Mr JONES — I have not done that research. I could certainly do that and provide that information to you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — That would be helpful, thank you. It probably makes the point that more information from the authorities will assist us. Thank you, Kevin. You will get a copy of the transcripts for you to look at and you may make minor corrections if something is inaccurate or has been transcribed wrongly. Thank you very much for attending; it has been most helpful.

Witness withdrew.
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Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
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Witnesses

Mr G. van Driel, General Manager, Engineering; and
Cr M. Nordbye, Shire of Moira.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The DEPUTY CHAIR — There is a transcript and recording being taken, and you are covered by parliamentary privilege in this room only. Perhaps for the record if you could introduce yourselves and give the committee a description of where Moira is and its particular problems, and then we will go into questions. We are pretty relaxed.

Mr van DRIEL — My name is Gary van Driel. I have recently taken the position of general manager, engineering, with Moira council, and this is Cr Mark Nordbye, a councillor with the shire.

I have prepared a brief slide presentation. We will go through that and then I am more than happy to answer any questions.

Overheads shown.

Mr van DRIEL — Just by way of background, Moira council is nestled in north-eastern Victoria and has a significant frontage to the Murray River. We are just over 4000 square kilometres in area with a population of almost 27 000 people. We have four major towns — Cobram, Yarrawonga, Numurkah and Nathalia. We also have a number of smaller towns and communities. As the council we are responsible for just over 3500 kilometres of local road network, a thousand of which are sealed and over 2500 kilometres of which are unsealed or unmade roads.

The characteristics of our road network are typically that we have a significant grid system of roads with a high number of crossroad intersections, and a large amount of remnant native vegetation within the road reserves. The history of the grid network was in part reaffirmed with a lot of soldier settlement subdivisions. Added to that, we have a network of irrigation channels and drains which crisscross through the irrigated area of our municipality. We have two rail networks, and because of the soldier settlement subdivision we have a significant network of school bus routes and milk tanker routes, and it is identified there that many of our road reserves are narrow — 20 metres or less.

By way of a very brief industry profile — and this is the late 1990s — it shows that within the Goulburn region, total production from agricultural industry is 26.4 per cent, and a bit over 5 per cent of the production value of Victoria comes out of our municipality. Something in the order of 70 per cent of our municipality is irrigated. Quite the vast majority of our road network consists of low-traffic-volume roads, and it identifies many kilometres there, both with the purple and the red, of less than 500 vehicles a day.

Council obviously spends quite a large sum of money maintaining the main road network; at the moment we still, in agreement with Vicroads, look after the main roads. There are some 270 kilometres of main roads within the Moira shire, and the 3500 kilometres of our own local road network. As to capital expenditure, council currently spends just on $2.3 million renewing the local road network. These statistics were taken through from 1998 to 2002. They show that quite a significant component of fatalities occur off our sealed road network.

Mr BISHOP — Can you go back to that one, because we are not going to see it again?

Mr van DRIEL — Yes, there is a copy of the disk there, and I also have a couple of hard copies of the presentation.

Mr BISHOP — What do you mean by unpaved? Paved is bituminised?

Mr van DRIEL — Yes.

Mr BISHOP — And gravel is just sheeted gravel?

Mr van DRIEL — That is correct.

Mr BISHOP — Is unpaved just dirt road?

Mr van DRIEL — Dirt roads, yes. By accident type, that is a fairly difficult slide to read at that distance, but it identifies with the dark blue and the purple significant percentages of run-offs on straights and curves, and also with the grey there, a large proportion of vehicles from an adjacent direction. A very high proportion of our fatal accidents are either intersection crashes or run-off-the-road crashes. That breaks down casualty accidents, and
again you can see that well over 50 per cent are either run-off-the-road crashes or hit from an adjacent direction. I think that reinforces the grid network of our — —

Mr EREN — Are these recent statistics?

Mr van DRIEL — Yes.

Cr NORDBYE — For 2002.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — These are the statistics on all your roads, including Vicroads controlled ones — that you look after, and your local roads?

Mr van DRIEL — That is correct.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — So council keeps a fairly comprehensive database.

Mr van DRIEL — Council earlier this year adopted a community road safety plan, and a lot of the statistics were developed during the course of the development of that plan, so that when we went to the community we could talk to them and have some meaningful statistics.

Mr BISHOP — The off-path-on-curve crashes, which is 32 per cent, do you have a breakdown of what happened when they went off? Did they run into a tree or a pole?

Mr EREN — That looks like 12 per cent.

Mr van DRIEL — Off path on straight.

Mr BISHOP — Same question — have you got an off-path-on-straight breakdown on that or on either of them?

Mr van DRIEL — By way of example we have some information on the fatal statistics for the 2003– 04 year to date, and if you go through those, quite a significant number when they do run off the road hit something.

Cr NORDBYE — Normally a tree.

Mr van DRIEL — Or a pole or an irrigation — —

Mr BISHOP — Would you have some data on that?

Mr van DRIEL — Yes.

Mr BISHOP — If we could get that, that would be helpful.

Mr van DRIEL — As mentioned, council has recently adopted a community road safety plan, and there was significant consultation from the community, particularly on the issues of fatigue, speed, dangerous intersections, trees too close to the road network, poor signage, education and unsealed roads. This was fed back from the community to the council, and we have subsequently developed a series of action plans to address the issues of engineering, enforcement, communication and responsible governance.

Costs between 1998 and 2000 show 378 casualty accidents, 147 serious injuries and 16 fatalities. Using some standard data, that is something in the order of $60 million of injury costs to our community, so it is quite a significant impact on the community. From 2002 to 2003 there were only eight fatalities in Moira shire.

Mr LANGDON — How many?

Mr van DRIEL — Eight last year, and we have had one this year.

Mr LANGDON — Is there any reason for that that you know of?

Mr van DRIEL — From the breakdown, again it was mainly either fatigue or speed.
Cr NORDBYE — We had one triple fatality, two doubles and the rest were singles. Most times singles will be run-off-road to left or right, which tends to be either fatigue or speed, but the triple one was trying to avoid police. It was not a pursuit; the police had seen them and went to go after them, but the police were in a Land Cruiser and they were in a Commodore so it was definitely not a pursuit. It turned out to be speed and alcohol and they failed to take a bend and hit a tree. The driver survived; the three passengers died. Another double fatality was an elderly couple coming back from Queensland. They got to the intersection of the Goulburn Valley Highway and the Murray Valley Highway and drove out in front of a milk tanker. We put that down to fatigue.

Mr van DRIEL — The community plan identifies those sections of the Goulburn Valley Highway as a fatigue zone. That is one of the issues that has come out through the community planning process.

On road safety issues, obviously there are significant costs to the community in relation to accidents. Just reiterating the facts, a large majority of the fatal and casualty accidents are either run-off-road or across-vehicle accidents, which rolls into the next issue of poor delineation of our road network. We are currently doing a signage audit across our municipality with a view to improving the signage arrangements at our various intersections. We have a significant number of unprotected roadside objects — trees and the irrigation channels. We have been in discussion with Goulburn-Murray Water looking at trying to create a prioritised list for the replacement of some of those crossing assets. Our roads are in a deteriorating condition. In a 1996 Department of Infrastructure study the shire was identified as one of the municipalities with the worst level of sustainability, which is the value of returning money back onto the road network. It probably predicted the council’s financial position at the time, and since that time we have been able to improve the situation quite well.

There is a significant increase in the awareness of road safety in our shire. Interestingly, our most recent community satisfaction survey identified a less than satisfactory perception by the community as to how we manage our road network.

In all, as a consequence of the process that the council has gone through we are focusing on a risk-based maintenance program. I mentioned the sign audit process that we are going through. Significant amounts of money have been spent on trying to identify sight distance issues at intersections. We have increased our roadside tree trimming program, and we have are installing road hazard signage at quite a few of our channel crossings.

As to black spot and grey spot funding, the black spot program was successful in securing funds to address a number of significant issues. The grey spot program identifies sites which have a potential future impact. It is very difficult to talk to the community about the black spot program because you really do need blood on the ground whereas the community wants our council to be far more proactive rather than reactive to sites.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Just while we are on that, do you have sections of the community who say, ‘There is going to be an accident happen here’? Not that there has ever been one but locals know that there have been a lot of near misses and so forth. What happens to that information? Is that what you call a grey spot?

Mr van DRIEL — That information is not captured within the Vicroads data set, and that is a real issue. Anecdotally I acknowledge lots and lots of near misses at certain locations, but they have never fallen under the spotlight of the black spot program because the near misses do not count.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Is that something that could perhaps be explored further? I know in my own area there are a couple of places where we know that there is going to be a very bad prang. There never has been one but everyone know that it is waiting to happen and one day it will. Is that perhaps an area that the committee should look at — how to identify an area where there are lots of near misses but no actual statistics?

Mr van DRIEL — I think that is really important. As I mentioned, our community definitely perceives the need to be proactive rather than reactive.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Being proactive.

Mr van DRIEL — And education. Definitely within our community road safety plan, community education, increasing awareness and creating advertising opportunities, supporting our safety committee and also the regional road safety committee.
Mr BISHOP — On the education bit, have you ever done any research in relation to driver education, and at what stage? I have a personal interest in training students at school before they get out and, if you like, know it all. Has the council looked at that at all?

Mr van DRIEL — Definitely there is a series of programs that VicRoads has put together. We are proposing to support some of those programs, and one of those is early education within the schools. That is a project that the council will have an opportunity to support during our next year’s budget.

Mr BISHOP — That is good.

Cr NORDBYE — In my other life, I am the officer in charge of the Katamatite police station. I used to run the police schools program for Cobram and most of the shire. Part of that was lecturing from preschool to year 12 and covering most of the road safety issues as well as being a member of the road safety council and that included running after-hours things. We went to one the other day at Murray-Goulburn where we were talking to drivers about fatigue and alcohol and the consequences of looking after your mate. Basically if you are driving or are going to drive, think further ahead than, ‘What is tomorrow?’ and things like that. But in the education system it is difficult to get time or get the people to get in there and run the programs. Most schools will accept someone coming in on a one-off basis, but after doing it for four years, I know that one-offs do not work; the only way to do it is to go to the school regularly and reinforce what you are doing. It is a bit like Life Education; they will visit the school for three days and then be gone. If they have not got the lead-up or the follow-up afterwards, it is a waste of three days.

Mr BISHOP — From your experience therefore, you would say that it would be an advantage for that to be in a school’s curriculum?

Cr NORDBYE — Road safety wise, yes, but it is the same as most things — the children have a perceived idea of what road safety is. They all have the idea that they are experienced or better drivers than their parents. So the hardest thing to get through to them is the fact that they are learner drivers and to become good drivers, as learner drivers they must drive as much as they can. That includes educating parents as well because their child has their learner permit, but if you are not letting them drive they are not learning anything. If they just go and do four lessons and then get their licence you are letting them out on their own. Once they get their learner licence the best thing is for them to drive as often as they can in every condition they can — at night, in the rain, whatever — because they will not be able to pick and choose once they get their licence.

Mr BISHOP — In the educational side of driving there is a debate about which value should be prioritised, and that debate is whether you should get them while they are at school — I am talking about our young drivers. The other debate is that they do not really learn anything unless they are on the road. That has been a debate that has been about for some time and probably will be for some time in the future. From your experience, is a combination of those two things the best way to go or — —

Cr NORDBYE — There have been studies. I know with the road safety council we used to have a member on it who was very keen on getting driver education in schools and keeping it in schools. They were looking at statistics from schools that ran driver education programs and how many of those were involved later on in serious accidents compared to those who did not run driver education, and I think provided they got the right education, it was a benefit, but it still comes down to the person themselves. With a lot of people, you can teach them everything and they will still want to do it their way.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — We will move on.

Mr van DRIEL — I have just taken a few snapshots through the municipality. That is very much a typical intersection within the council — a narrow road reserve of only 20 metres, with the utility poles very close to the edge of the road. In many cases the table drains actually form part of the irrigation network, so they often have a dual purpose. We mentioned the significant remnant vegetation — again a narrow road reserve, with the utility poles on one side of the road and the remnant vegetation on the other. That is just identifying the big trucks that tend to bypass through the Katamatite—Shepparton Road.

We have mentioned before that the Goulburn Valley is a fatigue zone, but we are finding with our traffic counts that there is a significant usage of the Katamatite—Shepparton Road as an alternate route to Tocumwal, rather than continuing up the Goulburn Valley Highway. As to trees on the edge of the road, council has increased the level of
funding to endeavour to remove a lot of the roadside suckers that have grown over the period of time. We mentioned the channel crossings protected in one form or another, but often not protected. Again, there is roadside vegetation with quite significant trees within 3 metres of the edge of the seal, and a lot of our channel crossings, although we have had a program of placing hazard markers. There is very little structural protection to those assets.

Mr BISHOP — Does the water authority take responsibility for that?

Mr van DRIEL — There is an old 1988 state rivers agreement that places responsibility between councils and the authority, but generally the signage is our responsibility. The maintenance of the asset to ensure that it functions is the responsibility of Goulburn-Murray Water, and if there was a proposal to extend the structure out beyond the clear zones, there is a formula that distributes the cost to the authority and to the council, depending on how old the asset is. We have had a commitment within our budget, under a road safety budget, to look at identifying and prioritising a program for replacement focused primarily on road safety. They tend to be innocuous structures until you hit them.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you. We will take some questions.

Mr LANGDON — On the issue of fatigue, for example, we were recently in Bairnsdale, and the great emphasis up there was that it was so many hours from Melbourne and fatigue was hitting people there. Do you find the opposite here, that people especially coming down the Newell Highway are pushing themselves; they think they are within 2 hours of Melbourne, so they keep going?

Cr NORDBYE — With the road safety council I was tied up with the Newell Highway fatigue program, which tried to link Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria to a fatigue program, because it is recognised that fatigue is a large issue there. One of our problems within the shire would be the Tocumwal bends, where you get the trucks coming down from Queensland. They have a fairly good run down a good highway, and then they get to the nice squiggly bit which is the Tocumwal bends and lots of bridges, and they tend to either hit the bridges or roll off the bridges.

Mr LANGDON — This is the trucks?

Cr NORDBYE — Yes. I have been in the area 15 years now and I think I have been to probably two or three accidents on every one of the bridges there. Quite a few are fatals. Most times if a truck rolls over, you are looking at a minimum 8 hours closure of the highway, which means you then have to divert from Tocumwal to Barooga, come back across the Barooga bridge, which is limited at the best of times, back in through Cobram and then back out again, so it can be a real nuisance. But fatigue is a problem. People tend to drive and they do not have a concept of how far Queensland is, I think, so they just start to drive, and they think, ‘We can do it in a day or come back in a day’. It is not working.

Mr LANGDON — Do you think the off-road camp sites can be improved to encourage people to come over, or do you have a standard size format for the rest areas, because some people suggested if they were better lit, it would make people feel safer? What would you say your rest sites were like?

Cr NORDBYE — We probably only have a couple within the shire that are wayside stops. There is one out near Strathmerton, and there is one down near Numurkah. There is the Lions Park at Katamatite. They are about the only ones that are wayside stops. I know at Katamatite we have a problem with an unofficial truck stop. It is not really a problem. It is good that trucks stop there, but it is not set up as a truck stop. It has just been developed over the year where trucks have pulled off. There are no toilet facilities, no lighting, and we have looked at that as the potential to say, ‘If we develop it into a proper truck site and give them somewhere to go to the toilet, somewhere that is lit, more trucks would stop there’.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Given that Moira is a fatigue zone, is there a need for a lot more rest stops and facilities for people going through and also —

Cr NORDBYE — I think what they would have done in the past is rely on places like roadhouses, hoping people will pull in at the roadhouse and stop, have a coffee, or something like that, but as far as pull over and rest, there are not a lot of wayside stops.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Would you say that is something that should be looked at?
Cr NORDBYE — Yes, because the Murray Valley Highway is the same. There is a stop out near Burramine, and then there is the one at Strathmerton, and that is about it.

Mr LANGDON — At the roadside cafes at service stations people get out and have a coffee, and that is excellent, but in your experience do people sleep there or have that 15-minute power nap?

Cr NORDBYE — Truckies will tend not to. Most times they will get out and stretch, have a coffee, and they think they are right again, and they will jump back in the car and drive, and often they will then fall asleep 10 or 15 kilometres down the road because it has not worked.

Mr van DRIEL — The unofficial truck stop that Cr Nordbye mentioned, we have on several occasions made application to Vicroads to receive funding to formalise that truck stop. Most of the trucks that are using those routes, they are either the highways or main roads; and they are ultimately Vicroads’ responsibility.

Cr NORDBYE — The problem with the truck stop is it is not actually Vicroads reserve; it is within a state park now. It is actually Crown land, which we only found out when we brought Vicroads up to have a look at it. The road is part of Crown land and does not belong to Vicroads, but it is something we will work out with them.

Mr BISHOP — Do you have any data as to whether those crashes are by local drivers or people coming through?

Cr NORDBYE — I can tell you from the statistics. These are for 2003–04. Single vehicle, Burramine: that was a local. Single vehicle into a tree: they were fruit pickers down from Queensland. Single vehicle off road: 27-year-old male was a local. Two vehicle collision at Ulupna bridge was a local. That was also a domestic as well, I think. Two vehicle under the tanker — they were from Melbourne. A 62-year-old struck by a courtesy bus was a local pedestrian. The single off-road accident into a channel was a local from Cobram and there was a single vehicle rollover where two local people died. The statistics we have within the community plan, which go back before this data, show that of 100 per cent of crashes, 27.4 per cent were within 0 to 5 kilometres of their place of residence; 17 per cent within 5 to 10 kilometres; 30 per cent within 10 to 50 kilometres, and then it drops down to 4.5 per cent within 50 to 100 kilometres; 6. per cent within 100 to 200 kilometres. It then jumps up again from 200 kilometres onwards.

Mr HARKNESS — Is non-compliance with seatbelt wearing in those crash statistics a problem within the shire?

Cr NORDBYE — I think with seatbelts, the only ones were the two young blokes killed at Strathmerton at the end of last year, where the two back-seat passengers did not have seatbelts on and were killed. The two front-seat passengers survived. I suppose compliance in wearing seatbelts is not a great issue but once alcohol or other things are involved, people tend to forget about seatbelts.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Has the council identified stretches of road that are becoming busier and busier for whatever reason, where the trees are obviously far too close to the road and you are at an impasse because you have either got to pull out a lot of trees or build barriers and it is expensive, or you are getting resistance to taking some trees out? Have you struck that problem?

Mr van DRIEL — Probably the Katamatite–Shepparton road is one very much along the lines to that which you are describing. A safety audit was conducted in the late 1990s and that identified quite a few issues. The trees are of such an extent that to take them out would be to take out some very substantial trees. Suffice to say that it always becomes an emotive issue then as to what a clear zone should be. Because a lot of the road reserves are very narrow, by the time you have the road in the middle, then the shoulder and the table drain and the trees, lots of time there is only room for one or two trees. So to take the offending trees out, you virtually denude those narrow road reserves.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — What is the solution?

Mr van DRIEL — I am aware of a program of installing guardrails for trees on the edge of roads that have some significance. I suppose the installation of guardrails creates a physical barrier. A few of the pictures show a lot of sucker regrowth and that probably reflects the need to be a bit more effective with roadside maintenance.
Cr NORDBYE — We have also looked at the bypass around Shepparton where the plan is for the Goulburn Valley Highway to continue from Strathmerton around and come back in at the other end of the Tocumwal bends, which would alleviate the Tocumwal bends, Strathmerton and the Murray Valley Highway. That stretch of road is where most of our fatalities occur. So our argument would be that if it is going to be based on fatalities alone, then we have a strong argument to say that this end should be constructed as well when they are doing the other one because that would also mean that the trucks that are using Katamatite as a main bypass would then stay on the Goulburn Valley Highway because it would be a better run down into Shepparton — we hope so, anyway.

Mr EREN — Do you have any pamphlets that you may be able to drop off to tourist bureaux in main cities to highlight that Moira shire is a fatigue zone and that drivers should rest at certain intervals?

Cr NORDBYE — The road safety council have some for the Newell Highway which it has distributed. It is actually a map that shows rest stops along the way. Originally it had vouchers so drivers could get free cups of coffee to encourage them to pull in at the stops or roadhouses on the way, to get their free coffee and take a break and then continue on. The pamphlet talks about the distances between here and there. A lot of people do not understand how far it is.

Mr van DRIEL — Specifically, I am not aware that the council has that data.

Mr HARKNESS — Has the road toll in the shire dropped over the last three or four years?

Cr NORDBYE — Last year was really bad; last year it was eight. We were one of the highest municipalities, but as I said it does not take long to get to eight with a triple and two double fatalities. The year before that we had a quadruple fatality where a truck ran over cars at roadworks. You only need one bad accident to put your figures right out the window, but this year, touch wood, we have only had one.

Mr EREN — So is speeding a problem?

Cr NORDBYE — Speed is a problem.

Mr EREN — I mean, do a lot of people speed?

Cr NORDBYE — I see speeds anywhere up around 150 kilometres an hour on the Katamatite–Shepparton road.

Mr van DRIEL — The difficulty we have is with the topography. We are in the floodplain of the Murray River; it is flat and the roads are straight. We have one road that traverses pretty much from one side of the municipality to the other and you can just about cross that without finding a single curve.

Mr HARKNESS — What is the law enforcement like?

Mr van DRIEL — Very good.

Cr NORDBYE — Not enough!

Mr LANGDON — On the law enforcement issue, obviously you are not going to have speed cameras on all the highways here. What about the point-to-point cameras that are being suggested on the Hume Highway? I know they are on the Newell Highway for trucks — —

Cr NORDBYE — The speed ones?

Mr LANGDON — The speed ones. Do you think that would encourage people to go slower?

Cr NORDBYE — It would depend on where you put them because if you put them on the Goulburn Valley Highway, then most of the trucks that are in a hurry would use the Shepparton–Katamatite road and avoid them.

Mr LANGDON — Put them on both!
Cr NORDBYE — On both would be interesting. One of the issues is that Moira shire is one of only two shires that do not have a 24-hour police station. We have 16-hour stations, but not 24-hour stations. Most people know that after 2 o’clock at the weekend the police are not there.

Mr EREN — So using your statistics, do a lot of accidents occur between those times?

Cr NORDBYE — Three o’clock, 2.15 — —

Mr van DRIEL — There are a fairly significant number at alcohol times — —

Mr BISHOP — And that is a fatigue time too!

Cr NORDBYE — A lot of them have knocked off work in Melbourne and make it up here at 7 o’clock or 8 o’clock at night and fall asleep.

Mr LANGDON — Or they may be trying to make up time to get there quicker, and fall asleep.

Mr van DRIEL — Yes.

Mr BISHOP — I am interested in your program — which is excellent by the way and I congratulate you on it — for tree removal, trimming and channel crossings. What sort of liaison with Vicroads do you have in relation to tree removal and trimming. For example, we have talked to other municipalities who have said, as Mr Stoney said, that it is simply too hard. They say, ‘By the time we have made our way through the environmental warfare, it is expensive to remove the trees’. What is your liaison with Vicroads? Can we have a one size fits all, and if so, who would dictate that? Would it be Vicroads or is it better to liaise with the local municipality to manage that particular issue?

Mr van DRIEL — I have only been with the council for a little over six months myself, and I would suggest that the dealings we have with Vicroads are very good. There have been a number of programs put to Vicroads over the last few years for specific tree trimming programs, and we have secured those funds. I think ultimately the debate needs to be had not only with Vicroads and council but also the community, possibly through the regional road safety committee, to try to come up with something that is palatable to the entire community.

Mr EREN — If I remember correctly you are spending something like $950 000 on unsealed roads and $450 000 on sealed roads. Is that because you have many more unsealed than sealed roads, and if so, how many of those accidents occur on unsealed roads?

Mr van DRIEL — It probably reflects the distribution of sealed roads to unsealed roads which is probably in the order of one-third to two-thirds. Our sealed road network is quite a good network but you would probably find that last year and this year the statistics are skewed a little bit because there has been a catch up on the backlog of work required on the unsealed network. So it is probably not a snapshot that would be fair and reasonable across a period of time.

Mr LANGDON — A two-part question: do you favour the one speed zone throughout a particular small town, particularly on the Newell Highway in New South Wales, where they have a common speed zone for every town, and then you get to Victoria, and there are multiple speed zones at times; and the second part, do you think councils should be able to vary a speed zone in a particular area? For example, if you believe an area is unsafe and you want it down to 80 and Vicroads insists it should be 100, do you think councils should have a greater say in that?

Cr NORDBYE — I know what I think. I know that some of my small towns have issues. Invergordon, where the main road goes past the school, is just a narrow bitumen road and it is 100 kilometres an hour because it is not within the town. The town is up and off, and the school has now fought to get speed reduction during school periods, to come down to 40 at opening and closing, but it is still a 100-kilometre-an-hour speed zone, yet it is only just a narrow bitumen road. It is met by another narrow bitumen road which is also 100 kilometres an hour. I know when I pull up in traffic on either the Shepparton–Katamatite Road or the Murray Valley Highway, one of their first questions is, ‘Isn’t this 110?’, so even if it is 100 people still presume it is 110 after coming up the Hume Highway for so long.
Mr van DRIEL — I think definitely council would like the opportunity to have a greater say in the rollout of the speed zones.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much. It was a most comprehensive presentation. It will be a great help.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Shepparton – 18 February 2004

Members

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

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

Staff

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

Witness

Mr M. Bruty, Infrastructure Manager, Shire of Campaspe.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The DEPUTY CHAIR — Just for the record, could you tell Hansard your name and position, please.

Mr BRUTY — It is Mike Bruty from Campaspe shire. I am the infrastructure manager for the shire.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — You are under parliamentary privilege here today. The proceedings are being recorded and later you will receive a transcript of your evidence. You can amend slight things. Perhaps to set the ball rolling, could you outline your position and where Campaspe is, and then we will have a general conversation. The committee needs to break in now and again, so will have a conversation through your presentation.

Mr BRUTY — Campaspe shire — and I have a shire map here — includes the area from Echuca, Kyabram, Rushworth, Stanhope, Girgarre, Rochester, up the river to Gunbower. So it is sort of on the west of the City of Greater Shepparton and north of Bendigo city. It takes in an area through that area there. We have a population of about 38 000, with the main town being Echuca, which has about 11 000 people; Kyabram has 5000 or 6000; Rochester has 3000, and then there are the other smaller towns. In general terms we have about 1100 kilometres of sealed road and another 2000 kilometres of gravel roads through our shire, and we have a number of other unmade roads et cetera.

In response to this inquiry today, we thought the best way to provide input to the inquiry was that we have just finished preparing a road safety strategy for the shire so we have had our own inquiry, so to speak, into the road toll in the shire and have prepared a plan. It was only last week that the shire adopted that strategy. That is really our inquiry into the road toll and what should be done about it.

I know this inquiry has two specific areas. One is fairly general, about the country road toll. Our inquiry has the issues that we found, and we put that report up as basically our input because we have done quite a lot of community consultation to put that report together. We held four community workshops. We targeted the youth in one workshop; we targeted the aged disability in another workshop; we targeted business in another; and we targeted the transport industry. So we had the four main areas which we targeted to try and hear from them their concerns with the roads, road safety and the road toll, and those sorts of issues.

The process we used was to get as much input from them as possible. What came out of the inquiry which we held last year was probably a truckload of issues, so to speak, and putting together this inquiry we had a steering committee to do that. We had some council representatives like myself, who had responsibility for roads, but we had the ambulance, and the Goulburn Valley road safety council represented there. We had VicRoads and those sorts of bodies represented on our steering committee, which piloted through this process, so we held various community consultation meetings and came out with a truckload of issues which we tried to categorise and collate to see what trends were in that to come up with probably a shorter list of the issues we seem to think predominate. Then we looked at actions that we could do to work towards addressing those issues which the community had raised. Alongside that investigation, we also had a fairly heavy look at all the road accident statistics that apply to Campaspe shire to see how that measured up with the issues that had been raised by the community. I will be handing over a copy of that report. There are 45 key issues and there is a whole range of actions which the shire was now resolved on proceeding with to address all those issues. That is it in general terms. If you want me to go on and speak about some of the key issues — —

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Apart from paying for it, what are the main impediments to rolling out your program?

Mr BRUTY — I suppose what came out of the program in general terms was that about 20 per cent of them are engineering issues, 80 per cent of them are private behaviour type issues — —

Mr LANGDON — Was fatigue high amongst them?

Mr BRUTY — Fatigue and all those sorts of things to do with the driver, people certainly brought up issues like, ‘This intersection is dangerous’ and, ‘We need those shoulders sealed’ and other technical issues. There are certainly a number of those in there, and I would say that they are around about 20 per cent, but 80 per cent is about all the other things like speeding, drink-driving and fatigue. Those are really what the issues are. Our action plan has included all of those and while the shire is there to build the roads and look after them — and we will do that — it has shown a willingness to get involved with trying to help do something about the behavioural issues as well because council sees itself in a pretty good position from the community’s point of view. It is the tier of government that is closest to the people and it might use its influence to change attitudes. Some of those actions
will involve coming to state inquiries, state and federal governments, lobbying and talking to big business to try to change their attitude and provide them with information — generally to try and work with all the main players and to use its influence. So 80 per cent of the actions that we propose are in that sort of area.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — In an inspection a couple of weeks ago we heard comments that drivers are not taking enough responsibility for their own actions. Your report has obviously identified the same. You have got things that are in a driver’s capacity to control such as fatigue, alcohol and going too fast, which is the responsibility of the driver. That is therefore an issue that perhaps we need to look at.

Mr BRUTY — Yes. The community comes to us with road safety issues. We try to have a policy of following up on all accidents that we know about, particularly if there is a fatal, but if other accidents are reported we try and do an investigation from a road design point of view. We have also seen police reports and in all those it is about driver behaviour. There are no two ways about it when you look at the bare bones of why the accidents occurred.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — So what is your suggestion for behavioural problems and people taking responsibility for themselves?

Mr BRUTY — Once again it is education. The youth were very interesting. I have twin boys who are 18-years-old. They have lots of friends and so I see a fair bit about them. We had the youth in. They are dynamite about drink-driving; we have come to the conclusion that they do not drink and drive. We have further information to say that it is more the older lot who are doing that. They value their licence; they do not want to lose their licence. That was interesting.

There is still an opportunity to work with some of the clubs about having nominated drivers and all those sorts of things. So in the drink-driving area there are things that can be done and from what we have learned I would have thought that there had been positive improvements in the last few years. One of the things that came out very strongly was that the youth think the testing and the requirements to get your licence are a joke: the testing is very basic. These days in all areas of education and work you have to do certain tests and achieve certain competencies. They were quite clear that getting a licence was a bit of a joke. Testing is very low key.

They also saw it as misdirected. For example, nowhere in the test do you have to show that you have an ability to drive on a gravel road. In our shire we have 2000 kilometres of gravel road and 1100 kilometres of sealed road. You might have to show how you can deal with a tram in Bourke Street or something, but there is nothing about driving on a gravel road and yet there are obviously a lot of skills involved in doing that. The kids can see through all of that. It came across quite strongly that they thought the testing requirements were inadequate. It is advisable to have an experience log in Victoria; in New South Wales it is compulsory, although there are ways of getting around it. The kids saw that there was a need to develop that requirement of experience and to have a more thorough theoretical and practical testing of the licence requirements.

Mr EREN — I notice that in the statistics for the year ended 2002, Campaspe shire was one of the highest in the region with 11 fatalities. Has that improved in the last year?

Mr BRUTY — Last year we had 1.

Mr EREN — Why was it so high in 2002?

Mr BRUTY — We do not know. It is in this report. Certainly Campaspe shire — and not last year because not all the statistics are in about fatalities, but in 2002 and going back the previous few years, we were back on the rise again. We do not know, and that is what we are trying to find that out through this inquiry.

Mr EREN — Were they local people or tourists?

Mr BRUTY — We understand that about two-thirds of the people who received injuries in the Campaspe shire were locals and the other one-third were visitors. We have a lot of visitors up our way, and there is a perception that we worry about the visitors. The Murray River runs along our northern boundary and a lot of holidaymakers come up there. They get onto gravel and local roads to get to the river. They come off the freeway and are not experienced with gravel roads. We have a lot of concern with the community about that. Locals and farmers who use the back and gravel roads have been brought up on them and they know how to handle them.
Then you get visitors who are trying to access the areas by roads on which they are not experienced — they may never have driven on such roads before. They see them as quite dangerous.

Mr EREN — Are there speed zones on the gravel roads?

Mr BRUTY — That is an issue. Like other parts of Victoria in the last few years we have been putting more speed restrictions right though the shire and lowering the speed limits. I think that has been happening everywhere. But on rural roads the guidelines do not allow you to set a limit lower than 100 kilometres an hour; it is a default 100 kilometres an hour. We have been talking to VicRoads about that because we believe that there are situations where a speed limit should be applied, whether or not there are houses. My view, and I think the shire’s view, is that gravel roads should have an 80 kilometres an hour limit. Gravel roads vary in standard and can vary from day to day, but if it is in reasonable condition, 80 kilometres an hour is still a pretty good speed on a gravel road. There are not many gravel roads where you can do 100 kilometres an hour. I think there should be a default 80 kilometres an hour on gravel roads. A lot of the time it is only safe to drive at 50 or 60 kilometres an hour on gravel roads.

Mr BISHOP — A view has been expressed to the committee in relation to the issue that if restrictions signs — such as ‘80’ — are put on, people will drive at 80 kilometres an hour, which brings us back to your point of education rather than enforcement being the better way to go. Do you have a view on that?

Mr BRUTY — I have been involved with roads for a number of years and my perception in the last few years is that there has been a loosening up in applying speed limits; in other words getting approvals through VicRoads to apply them more readily. As I said, quite a lot of work has been done to reduce speed limits around and in towns in the last few years. I have had one complaint about that. We have been putting the speed limit down to 50 kilometres an hour in rural residential subdivisions, which was never done in the past.

We put one on a collector road in a rural residential area, and someone rang up and said, ‘That’s a bit low’. But that is the only time I have received a complaint, and yet we have increased the speed limit zones in the towns and lowered them — all those sorts of things — quite a lot right across the shire in the last three, four or five years. People obviously expect that they are going to see lower speed limits. The campaign through the press and media about going slow must be getting through, because people expect to see lower speed limits.

We are about to in the next month have the 40 kilometres an hour around the schools system put in. We do not have it yet. I understand, talking to VicRoads, that there have been some repercussions there where they have applied a permanent 40 on streets which are almost collector-type streets. We have a couple like that which will be included in the program, so it will be interesting to see whether we get any reaction. But the thing is that the community seems to expect or accept lower speed limits when they are applied. Certainly education has to go with it, because people have got to get this thinking that driving slower is really what we have to do.

Mr LANGDON — What about common speed limits throughout your smaller towns — i.e., going from 100 to 80, 70 to 80, to 60, to 40, particularly in the New South Wales towns, where they have common speed limits?

Mr BRUTY — So you go from 100 to — —

Mr LANGDON — To 50 all throughout the town.

Mr BRUTY — Certainly there is a bit of concern. I have had an odd comment where you are doing that, dropping down, and people start to see it as a bit over the top with all the signage, and then they have to be right on the mettle to know what speed zone they are in, so I think there is a bit of a danger there, from my reading, that we could overdo that, because someone did make the comment to me that, to be fair to the drivers, it is getting a bit harder for them in some respects because there are a lot more signs they have to read about what speed zone they are in or what they are supposed to be doing, and the system has not helped them there much. But I think probably the answer is if we can get people driving to learn to slow down and drive to the conditions, they will be within their zone.

Mr BISHOP — I have a couple of questions, the first one in relation to roadside objects: how do you make a decision in relation to which tree should be removed, and do you liaise with VicRoads on that particular issue, and have you got a policy relative to that?
Mr BRUTY — We do not have a policy. Basically we respond to complaints, and I might say, just digressing a little bit, that I see all the letters that come into council about roads and road issues, and compared to 5 years ago and certainly compared to 10 years ago, a lot more of the safety issues are raised in those letters from the community. Some of them run the safety issue to try to get something done, but you can see a lot of genuine letters come in, and they are concerned about a safety issue on the road or an intersection. So there has certainly been a ramp up with the community. The community is aware of road safety, and it has certainly ramped up, I believe, and a big proportion of our letters about roads are about safety. If we get a letter, we have to respond, so we do an interim investigation of that situation and then do an assessment of what we are going to do. At the end of the day we have to make a judgment as to what we see as the risk and what we see as the cost of rectifying it, and all those sorts of things come into it.

We have had instances where people have asked about a specific tree, but there have not been a lot — not on local roads. I think people have come to accept that local gravel roads have trees around and they have to drive to the conditions. I think that is more important — people learning to drive to the conditions. Certainly sometimes if you can remove a tree, you open up the speed, which is making it more dangerous, because there are a lot more trees a little bit further out; there is a real dilemma in those sorts of things.

Mr BISHOP — I am not only referring to local roads in this instance, but all roads in your — —

Mr BRUTY — Where it comes into play is we have black spot funded jobs and you get a dilemma there because you get funding to do a job and upgrade it, and if you are going to bring it to the real standard, you would demolish every tree and pipe every culvert, fence to fence, and do the whole job, so at the end of the day there is always some level of compromise in what you do and what you do not do. Then we do have this thing with the Department of Sustainability and Environment concerning, ‘You cannot take the trees out, and if you do you have to plant 100’, and that sort of stuff.

Mr BISHOP — What effect does that then have on your decision if DSE says to you as council, ‘If you take that tree out, you are going to have plant another 100’?

Mr BRUTY — That adds cost. You have to have a location to plant the 100, and if you are only looking at road reserves, where do you plant 100 trees on a road reserve safely? Sometimes you have a 2 or 3-chain reserve and you have an opportunity, but often you cannot do it in an immediate area. I think they probably need to be a bit more flexible. I can see where they are coming from, but if you take a tree out there, maybe you have to be allowed to put one in 10 miles away.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — At this stage you have to put them adjacent; you cannot put them a few miles away?

Mr BRUTY — Within a fairly close location, yes. I think there needs to be a little bit of thought put into that. But when they say that, it is a cost, for a start off, and you are not only putting them in, you have to maintain them, and that is not cheap in our environment, where you need water and that sort of thing. There is certainly a conflict there, but if you are responsible for road safety, it is a fairly onerous-type responsibility, so making a decision to not remove a tree, you feel as though you are in the gun — you are going to be sued or something like that — so that is a dilemma. I have seen it come into play where we get funding to upgrade the road to a safer standard and we get into this tug of war with the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Mr EREN — Have you had a tug of war on a particular issue, on a particular tree?

Mr BRUTY — We have had issues where it has been a lengthy resolution, where we have had to be toing-and-froing until we finally got a resolution on what trees can come out.

Mr EREN — How many of these applications would you have made?

Mr BRUTY — It has mainly come up where there has been a black spot project where we have funding to upgrade the road, so probably in my time there have been about two or three over the last five years.

Mr EREN — Over those two or three, which one was the sticking point? Were all three of them sticking points, or one of them?
Mr BRUTY — I would not say they were sticking points. There were meetings on site and further discussions. It was not a matter you could resolve in 5 minutes, but we got it resolved. When you have a tree, you have to deal with it.

Mr HARKNESS — What type of preventive or promotional programs are put in place regarding drugs, fatigue and alcohol by either the council or other organisations like that?

Mr BRUTY — Nothing at this stage, and that is what this strategy includes — facilitating those programs and working with other organisations and business and whatever. What Campaspe has resolved to do is appoint a sort of part-time person for the next three years to work on this program.

Mr HARKNESS — A road safety officer?

Mr BRUTY — Yes.

Mr HARKNESS — Funded by council?

Mr BRUTY — Funded by council. It will be only a part-time position to implement this strategy here. As I said, 80 per cent of it is behavioural, so there are a lot of things in there about working with clubs, talking to businesses, the government, lobbying — all those sorts of things — providing information about our accident records to some of the big businesses town. One of the issues that came up was fatigue, as you said. Where we are in Echuca, for example, people go down to meetings in Melbourne, have the meeting and drive home all in the one day. There should be more awareness that that is a dangerous thing to do. Perhaps getting larger businesses to come up with guidelines to manage that, so if people have to go to a long all-day meeting they must either have a co-driver or stay overnight.

Mr HARKNESS — Will that person have an educative role as well — going into schools and coming up with programs like alternative transport or — —

Mr BRUTY — Yes, there is that sort of element in there, but it is limited by the number of hours that we can have this person as to how far they can go, but we believe there is a role there and we link up with the likes of the Goulburn Valley road safety council to work on those programs.

Mr LANGDON — On the issue of fatigue again, you are a fair way off the main highway, do you have any rest areas? Are there enough of them? Are they well enough lit?

Mr BRUTY — Certainly when we were doing this report we talked about this issue. I noticed and other people commented that we are 200 kilometres from Melbourne. It is couple of hours from the northern part of Melbourne and about 2½ hours to the city. If you go to Melbourne and have your meeting, on the return you get a bit beyond Heathcote and the road is straight and it is very easy to get drowsy and lose concentration. The plan is to look at some of those things and how people are affected by it and whether there are enough rest areas or signs saying, ‘Stop, pull over for 5 minutes’. We feel that that sort of stuff is useful but there needs to be a bit more research into where they should go. There is an issue there.

Mr LANGDON — You talked about gravel roads and speed zones, are there any particular bitumen roads where you believe Vicroads has put the wrong speed limit?

Mr BRUTY — Any bitumen road?

Mr LANGDON — And have you had trouble getting Vicroads to change that speed limit?

Mr BRUTY — No, we have a very good relationship with Vicroads on speed limits. We have worked with them all the way. Obviously they have to approve our local roads, and on highways we have asked it to change speed limits one or two at times near the towns and we have worked it out satisfactorily. I think we have been kicking in the same direction as Vicroads on road speed issues. It is very important that Vicroads has that control over speed limits because of uniformity across the state. It needs to apply the standards uniformly. I do not think it would be a good idea for councils to have their own power to put speed limits because you will get different approaches across the state. I do not think drivers need that; they have enough to contend with in terms of increased signage. We have found we can work constructively with Vicroads, and providing there are some guidelines to work with everyone is happy with; the system works fine.
The DEPUTY CHAIR — Is there anything else you would like to add before we wind up?

Mr BRUTY — No, I have nothing further to add. I think the report contains a lot of information that will be useful.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you. That was very comprehensive. You will receive a copy of the transcript in due course. Thank you very much for giving us your time.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Shepparton – 18 February 2004

Members

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

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

Staff

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

Witnesses

Mr G. Pollard, Manager, Design and Projects; and
Cr. R. Weatherald, Shire of Strathbogie.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
Mr POLLARD — My name is Graeme Pollard. I am the manager of design and projects with Strathbogie Shire Council.

Mr POLLARD — I have handed over copies of our submission to the executive officer. The basis of our submission is to deal with trees and clearance along the roadway to maintain a safer environment. I was intending to talk to and read elements of the submission which we have prepared and handed out.

The Strathbogie Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this parliamentary inquiry and thanks the committee for that opportunity. The council actively supports the need for improved road safety and recognises that as a state we have made significant advances in the area, and also recognises that we have more to do as a community to further improve road safety at all levels. We also believe that a broad definition of road safety must be used to ensure that the whole community can take part in it.

We recently made a submission to VicRoads as part of the proposed road management bill process. This is built out of part of that submission.

In accordance with the Local Government Act and we have cited section 203 — the council is vested with control of the road network. This applies to roads which are not part of the declared main road network or that are under the control of the Department of Sustainability and Environment. The council is the statutory road authority. The Strathbogie council has conducted its best value review as required by legislation and of course contractors. The outcome of that community input to our best value review focused on three major areas of concern for the council. They were that we needed to improve and maintain the edge breaks on our bitumen sealed roads; that sealed road shoulder maintenance was of concern and also the encroachment of roadside vegetation into the roadway area. All of these relate to and have some sort of impact on road safety. If we could set aside the financial resource constraints, then the first two issues are within the control of the council. But with regard to the clearance envelope or pruning and lopping of native vegetation, we get caught up in the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, which says that we need to get a planning permit for any lopping, pruning or removal of native vegetation.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Do this include suckers that have come up on the shoulders? Do you have to get permission when the grader goes along to take a few suckers out?

Mr POLLARD — Provided they are less than a certain age, less than 10 years old, we are entitled to take them out. However, over the time our maintenance practices have not been as good or as thorough as they could have been, and some of those are now beyond that 10-year window. Currently that is what we do. We pick them up as we go through.

We have recently had experience where we sought to obtain a planning permit to prune the clearance envelope, to create a clearance envelope, over our whole municipal road network. We were required to go through our planning group to obtain that planning permit, obviously. The planning group is required under the current legislation to refer that to DSE. They replied back with a vast number of conditions which I think were somewhat onerous, but we are currently working with them. One of the things they did apply was a 12-month time limit on our planning permit for those works, which means obviously in less than 12 months time we have to go through this whole process again, which is community advertising et cetera.

What we would like to see, and the request that basically comes out of this, is that a recommendation come forward from this inquiry that councils be exempt from the need to apply for a planning permit to maintain a defined clearance envelope. What we see as a problem we have is that one branch of the state government permits large vehicles to use the road network, requiring larger clearance envelopes, and we have another branch of the state government which constrains us in doing our particular work. We would like to see a recommendation come forward that councils have an as-of-right ability to maintain a defined clearance envelope.
I have suggested in here a clearance envelope. Vicroads, as part of their routine maintenance specification, define a clearance envelope of 1 metre from the back edge of the shoulder of the road formation, so it is 1 metre from outside a formation to outside a formation, 5 metres high, so that vehicles can move along without worrying about impacting or being impacted by vegetation.

I would like to extend that, and what we submit here is that it should be 1 metre from the back edge of a roadside drain. That would then serve a number of functions. It would maintain the clearance envelope and we can prune and lop and remove the trees as required to maintain that clearance envelope. It also deals with the issue of a clear zone along the outside of the travel path so that if vehicles do become wayward and the driver loses control, he or she has an opportunity to regain control of that vehicle. It also provides us with the opportunity to more effectively maintain our drainage and our asset, and the community’s asset. I have included in our submission a drawing of what we would expect that clearance envelope looks like. That is one of our requests.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Just backtracking a little bit, have you had instances where your permit time has run out, for whatever reason — perhaps it may be too wet or too dry — and therefore you have had to reapply really for no need because it has already been approved? Have you had instances of that?

Mr POLLARD — No, we have not, because we have only just recently received it. It happened late last year.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — These are new requirements for the 12 months?

Mr POLLARD — We have just started on this process. Prior to that we had not undertaken large amounts of it, but following our best value review process, where the community expressed this concern, we have ramped up our funding in that area and therefore had to undertake the planning permit process.

There are other conditions on that planning permit, such as advising the Department of Sustainability and Environment when we are about to do the works if we were to exceed clearing or pruning works over a 50-metre length of a particular type of roadway, high or medium conservation roadway. We then have to give DSE at least two weeks notice so they can have the option of coming out and having a look at the works. We also have to report quarterly back to DSE on what works we have done. So there are those other administrative processes that I would consider are wasteful and also reduce operational flexibility.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — So would you favour an as-of-right metre back from the table drain rather than a mixture of some removal of trees and some barriers? Perhaps there might be significant trees that could be protected by a barrier and still make it quite safe for the traffic. How would you manage that process, and how would big trees like that be protected in that process so that councils did not take everything regardless?

Mr POLLARD — That is certainly an option. Another option to this proposal here is that we can as of right prune and lop to the clearance envelope in accordance with the Vicroads thing, but certainly any removal of large trees would have to go through the planning permit process. I can understand that, and we would be prepared to concede that.

Ideally in any sort of hazard process you remove the hazard where you can, and that is the first option. Then you move through to protect the hazard from people who want to impact on it or may impact on it; otherwise it has to be signage after that.

Mr LANGDON — How does this proposal affect the embankments, because they cause quite a few accidents as well? They are roadside objects as well, so how do you relate that to embankments?

Mr POLLARD — People colliding with the embankment or rolling down an embankment?

Mr LANGDON — Colliding with.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Cuttings, I suppose.

Mr POLLARD — Apart from making the cutting wider, I cannot offer you any other suggestions.

Mr LANGDON — But if you are suggesting the width to protect people from trees, the same thing should apply with cuttings then?
Mr POLLARD — I guess cuttings tend to run parallel to the direction of travel, so you do not get this blunt impact on it — unless it is a T-intersection, of course, sorry. But with people colliding with trees, it tends to be a head-on type of situation, standing there, and you do not get a glancing blow at it. With a cutting you tend to glance into it.

Mr LANGDON — I recall one council’s statistics for running into cuttings were quite high.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I thought it was embankments, which means it had rolled down an embankment. I think you might be getting confused with that.

Mr LANGDON — I might be.

Mr POLLARD — A few years ago in an area just to the west of Mansfield where the Midland Highway hits the Maroondah Highway at a T-intersection, there were regularly instances of people missing the T-intersection and colliding with or crashing into the embankment on the other side, but VicRoads has undertaken significant works since then — lighting, installation of rumble strips and those sorts of things — to make sure that people are aware or to maximise the opportunity for people to be aware that there is a change of direction coming up.

Mr EREN — Have you done an audit identifying these hazards and how many of these hazards exist in your shire?

Mr POLLARD — No, we have not. We know there are lots.

Mr HARKNESS — What percentage of fatalities or serious injuries over, say, the last 12 months are attributed to a vehicle colliding with a tree or another roadside object?

Mr POLLARD — You have got me there. There have not been a large number. I think you will find that most of the crashes in Strathbogie shire are on the Hume Freeway, which is outside of our control. There have been some crashes on the declared main road network — primarily the Euroa to Mansfield road. Together with VicRoads we have been successful in obtaining some money for additional guardrailing works along there to protect some of the trees which are in a modified clear zone. We are still seeking to get approval to remove a number of trees which are now no longer outside the area protected by the guardrail.

Mr EREN — Just from looking at these photos that you have provided, it appears that there are many thousands of trees that probably need to be cut down. In terms of capacity of council to carry out these works and implement some of these things that are required, how would you go about doing it?

Mr POLLARD — We would not be able to remove all of those hazards. One of the other proposals in the submission is that the control and management of rural road reserves outside the clearance zone returns to DSE because it has the skills and competencies to look after those things. As I have stated in other forums, councils have finite resources. We have to try and do the best we can with what we have got. We focus on our high priority roads first and work our way through it, but it would allow us to start. We will not get it finished, but it will allow us to start.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I notice that in Strathbogie you have a particular problem with bridges.

Mr POLLARD — Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — You have had quite good publicity over the years on the bridge issue. I think you have over 100 bridges. Would you like to expand on that a little bit and perhaps tell the committee your safety concerns with those bridges. Have there been a few accidents on those bridges? What program is required to bring those bridges back to a safe condition?

Mr POLLARD — As you said, the Strathbogie shire has 135 bridges. Of those, approximately 60 have gross load limits on them. We are still working our way through them to conduct structural audits so we can assess what their capacities are and effectively sign them. The council has used approximately 70 per cent to 75 percent of its Roads to Recovery funds from the federal government on its bridge program. We are currently part way through our bridge replacement strategy which was commenced back in the year 2002-03, where we identified that we had to carry out works on 25 of our bridges. We have replaced or dealt with 17 of those so far. We are moving to bridges constructed with permanent materials rather than timber, which requires more regular treatment. That will
allow us to have a longer effective life of our structures and reduce maintenance costs. We have higher capital costs, but the whole-of-life costing for these structures will be less. Because they are man-made structures we know how they will perform and how they will decay, and therefore we can make assessments on what the load capacities are. With increasing vehicle size, the design standards of bridges change. We have bridges which are in a reasonable condition, but with the increasing size of vehicles they are now substandard to what the community needs or what people require for their normal community activities.

As far as collisions on bridges are concerned, I am unaware of those, but bridges are an integral and most important part of a road network because they allow connectivity. If a bridge is out, then the road network is severely disrupted. So our council has focused relatively huge resources on trying to improve its bridges.

_The DEPUTY CHAIR_ — I know you had a very tragic accident at Nagambie and there have been complaints about railway crossings at Avenel being very rough, and I believe there have been incidents at crossings. Does council have a policy on railway crossings on the Shepparton and Wodonga lines?

_Mr POLLARD_ — Council has implemented the requirements of an audit that was done by Vicroads there for us a few years ago — I cannot recall the exact number of years ago. Also as part of our maintenance management plan we keep an eye on those. We have also had discussions with Vicroads and the rail authority, whose name I cannot recall.

_The DEPUTY CHAIR_ — It keeps changing.

_Mr POLLARD_ — That is another aspect. It gets difficult trying to define who is responsible for what and then tracking them down. We recently had to do some work on a rail crossing just outside Longwood to improve the approach road to it. We are in the process of refining ourselves. We are working through the requirements of the proposed road management bill as to how we manage our road asset for our community.

_The DEPUTY CHAIR_ — So with that unprotected rail crossing at Avenel, is it resolved who looks after the potholes between the lines? I know it is a council road, but what area does the rail authority have jurisdiction over? How is it resolved?

_Mr POLLARD_ — The rail authority — —

_Mr BISHOP_ — Victrack.

_Mr POLLARD_ — I am not sure of the correct term, but one authority has the land and it has been outsourced to somebody else to travel up and down the tracks. The council is responsible for the road 2.1 metres or 7 feet beyond the nearest rail. Once you are within that, then it is up to one of those contractors to look after it. They are responsible for the maintenance. The argument would be that if it has a gravel surface, then they will maintain that gravel surface. If it is a sealed surface, they will maintain that sealed surface. There will be no capital upgrade of the surface. They have to maintain it.

_The DEPUTY CHAIR_ — So if council chose to offer to do the work because it was obviously unsafe and there is a lot more traffic on the road, would that be allowed? How would go about it?

_Mr POLLARD_ — It is my belief that that would be available provided you complied with the particular rail safety protocols that go with it. We would just become a contractor.

_The DEPUTY CHAIR_ — Conversely, if the council considered the rail crossing unsafe, how would you go about ensuring an upgrade of that crossing by the appropriate authority?

_Mr POLLARD_ — Now I am entering into areas where I am purely speculating. I would expect there would be discussions with the various government authorities to see what could be done. May I ask which particular Avenel crossing you are talking about?

_The DEPUTY CHAIR_ — There have been a couple of incidents on the Avenel–Mangalore road. I am more interested in the principle of who looks after that.

_Mr POLLARD_ — There have been recent discussions regarding the Avenel–Nagambie road in the centre of Avenel. The process has been started to replace what was a lights crossing with boom gates. That came to an
abrupt halt when one of the posts to support the boom gate arm was hit by a vehicle using the road. There have been discussions between Victrack, Vicroads and ourselves about that being declared a main road. Vicroads has been a prime party to it, and because we have parking lanes and those sorts of things near there, we have been involved. There has been, I believe, a resolution of that where ordinary semitrailers can move through that crossing with the boom gates in their current position. B-doubles are the cause of concern, but Vicroads is moving to take that road off as an approved B-double route, so that will remove the need for the longer vehicle in the larger street paths.

Mr BISHOP — I note that the freeway goes right through your shire. What is your policy on clearways and respite stop areas on other roads in your municipality? Are they big enough for a couple of trucks and a car or two? Are they safe?

Mr POLLARD — With regard to rest areas for commercial vehicles, is that what you are talking about?

Mr BISHOP — And cars.

Mr POLLARD — We do not have any defined rest areas that are not either on the Goulburn Valley Freeway or the Hume Freeway that are not on the declared main road network. Our other view, I would believe, is that we would prefer that people stopped and took their rest in the towns and availed themselves of the commercial activities that are there for their enjoyment.

Mr EREN — What is the population of Strathbogie?

Mr POLLARD — About 9000 people in total.

Mr EREN — In 2002 there were six fatalities. Did that change in 2003?

Mr POLLARD — That I am not sure of.

Mr EREN — So you do not know the fatalities for last year?

Mr POLLARD — No, I do not.

Mr HARKNESS — Regarding alcohol, drugs and fatigue, to what degree have they played a role in previous fatalities and serious injuries? And a second question: we have heard from the previous council to address the committee that it intends to employ a part-time road safety officer to address some of the issues in its shire. Does your council have a road safety officer or does it intend to get one?

Mr POLLARD — In answer to your first question as to the effect of alcohol and drugs, I cannot answer that. I do not know. With regard to the second one, council has in the last 12 to 15 months received a $5000 grant from Vicroads to develop a municipal road safety strategy. We have just started on the process of developing that. We have had our initial meeting and we have to go out to the community to find out their views on road safety, and once again we emphasise the broad view of road safety, which is not just physical stuff, but also the mental stuff — the education and those sorts of things. We are just starting down there. I will not pre-empt what the outcome of that strategy could be. It may well be that, yes, it is a part-time road safety officer, or it may well be that, no, we will not worry about that.

Mr HARKNESS — Do the council or other agencies within the municipality have in place any promotional or preventative strategies at the moment or educational programs to address these issues?

Mr POLLARD — We work with the Goulburn Valley community road safety council. One of our councillors was the former chairman of that committee and is still heavily involved in it. We regularly sponsor the meetings of the executive of that community road safety council, and we have undertaken a number of programs such as Keys Please and older driver programs. The aim is to continue delivering those. We have still got funding to keep that going.

Mr LANGDON — I notice with your pictures and the issue in relation to the trees, that the trees that are closest to the road are all on gravel roads. What is your opinion of the default speed limit of 100 kilometres an hour on gravel roads?
Mr POLLARD — I have always been a person that believes that just because it is there, you do not have to drive it. You still have to drive in accordance with the conditions of the road. One of the things that I believe is important in the proposed road management bill is that it outlines some factors that put responsibility back on the driver to drive in accordance with the conditions, albeit that one of the questions that typically was on your drivers licence when you went for it was, ‘If you see a 60-kilometre-an-hour sign, does that mean you have to drive at it?’, and the answer was, ‘No, you always drive according to the conditions’. So I have no problem with a default speed limit of 100 kilometres an hour on state roads outside of defined zones.

Mr LANGDON — What about gravel roads and so on?

Mr POLLARD — Once again, you drive according to the conditions.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — So you are saying that drivers should take more responsibility for their own actions and perhaps in that have better training?

Mr POLLARD — Certainly, yes. Drivers have to take responsibility for their own actions. There is significantly more emphasis put on the driver training prior to going for your licence than when I went for it, which was a long time ago, but with the advertising that goes on about the minimum of 120 hours in all conditions so that you get experience, whether there needs to be more of that depends on the individual, of course, and the particular skill, but I think that is a reasonable threshold.

Mr EREN — Would you also agree that there are some people out there who may find that with the conditions of the major roads they can do 160 kilometres an hour, but they should not and they cannot?

Mr POLLARD — Yes, I am not suggesting an open limit. There has to be an upper threshold, yes.

Mr EREN — Conditions may mean that sensible drivers would slow down on a gravel road, but there are some out there who need to be convinced that they should lower their speed limit. Do you agree with that?

Mr POLLARD — In some circumstances, yes. You cannot have an open limit; you have to have some sort of control there. But by the same token, you have to trust them at some point, and you cannot put speed limit signs up on every road.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — The committee is very interested in driver education and training, and I know Mr Bishop has a particular interest in that. Perhaps he would like to expand on that.

Mr BISHOP — We have heard various views in relation to driver education as we have travelled around. One view is that it is best to get the younger drivers while they are at school and at a very formative stage teach them the right thing. The other view is that they should go to a more advanced training level later on, an on-road type training. Have you ever done any work in relation to that, or does council have a view on that?

Mr POLLARD — I personally have not. The view of the council would come out through the development of a municipal road safety strategy, and as we have been emphasising throughout, we see road safety as a broad term rather than being read down to, say, the number of traffic lights or traffic signals installed. It has to be across the whole range of opportunities and forums, such as education and the mental and physical side of things, and also a more forgiving environment where we can get that.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Do you have anything else to add, Graeme, or does the committee have any other comments? We have three councillors present here from Strathbogie. Thank you for attending. If any of the three would like to say something, they could come up and have something to say.

Mr BISHOP — I have a further question. We have asked other municipalities how they keep themselves informed on the road accident situation. It seems to us there is not a strong enough link between municipalities, VicRoads and the police in a reporting process. Can you give us some insight into how your council keeps itself informed on those particular issues?

Mr POLLARD — The answer I would have to give is that we have a strong link through the Goulburn Valley community road safety council, but with regard to a formal process, I am unaware of that, Sir.
Mr BISHOP — Do you think it would be an advantage if there were a cross exchange of information between all of those authorities?

Mr POLLARD — Certainly, because of the sharing of information in the process. Once again the municipal road safety strategy that we developed identified that it could be one of the things or that there be monthly or quarterly meetings between the various bodies.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Councillor, could you please introduce yourself for the benefit of Hansard?

Cr WEATHERALD — My name is Robin Weatherald. I am a councillor for the Seven Creeks Riding in Euroa, and I am a member of the Strathbogie Shire Council.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you. You are covered by parliamentary privilege in this room. Would you care to make a short statement? We only have a few minutes, but you are welcome to add to what has already been said.

Cr WEATHERALD — I would like to strongly support the statement given by the shire’s officer. I would probably put a little more emotion into it, because I believe that the issue of trees and the position that the shire has outlined to you is a serious problem to a shire with the resources of Strathbogie shire. For example, in the chamber we have had explained to us, and you have seen the photographs given to you by the shire, that where the trees overhang the carriageway they become a considerable danger because limbs fall. We have had explained to us that the shire will be required to get a planning permit and go through the process and undertake the planting of trees as replacement for that limb. That is a really over-the-top exercise, and I object to it.

Just pointing to the plan that the officer gave you of the road construction, I recently drew to my council’s attention the serious situation on the main bitumen road from Euroa up to Strathbogie where it enters the foothills and climbs up past the reservoir. The incursion of new native gums is extraordinary. The young trees in our shire do not need planting; they grow as a matter of course, and if you leave a piece of ground unattended, it will fill up with gum trees in a short time. I have pointed out to my council that it needs to start exercising its prerogative and take the trees out before they get to 10 years of age, because they are threatening the road surface. As a committee you should take on board that if a road does not have suitable drainage then it has a very short life; drainage is fundamental in the maintenance as explained to me by officers — I am not an expert in road building. I would say to you that if trees interfere with the roadside drainage, then we have serious problems. I have to support the council’s situation. I have gone a step further and proposed a motion which I attempted to get up in council, and rather than read it to you I will provide you with a copy. I have also provided a number of photographs here, and I will add them to my submission because I do not have time to go through all of them.

Another issue I would like to take up with you is black spot funding. The Strathbogie shire has been a huge beneficiary of the state government’s significant initiative on black spot funding. I believe that is not going to continue, and that is a sad problem for a shire like ours; we need it.

I need to strongly back up the council’s officer on the issue of unsafe rail crossings in the shire; I think we have 28 of them. There are varying degrees of safety concerns about them. I refer to an incident that happened earlier this year. I went across the rail crossing at approximately the time of the incident two weeks later. I would classify that crossing as highly unsafe because of a number of factors: where the sun was at the time; the position; the grass, the hills and the trees. There are really serious problems on a number of rail crossings in the Strathbogie shire, and I am pushing, but I have not been able convince my fellow councillors, for the shire to have a policy on rail crossings. It needs to actively lobby state and federal governments to meet their responsibilities. The very esteemed citizen that we lost this year was an exceptional person who was not known to make fundamental, simple or stupid errors of judgment. He was a man for whom I had the greatest of esteem, although I constantly fought with him over lots of issues. He had an admirable capacity to be spot on, not 99 per cent of the time but 100 per cent of the time. In this instance we have a clear example of a loss of life, not due to personal incompetence or misbehaviour but because of a structure.

I suggest to members of this committee that if they get the opportunity and are going up the road to Shepparton at any time, they turn down the Kirwans Bridge Road — it is only about 600 metres off the freeway — and drive across that railway crossing. It is a primary example of unsafe railway crossings in Victoria, and the Shire of Strathbogie has too many of them.
The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you. I know the crossing and I fully agree with your comments. We are out of time unless there is something. Thank you both for attending. You will receive a transcript and you may make minor corrections. It has been most useful.

Cr WEATHERALD — May I leave some budget figures about the cost of trees to the shire? We spend about 8 per cent of our budget on tree management, and a typical example is bitumen road maintenance. The single biggest item in budget terms is the clearing of trees. That is nothing to do with the application of bitumen to roads.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll
Shepparton – 18 February 2004

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

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

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

 Witnesses
Mr P. McPhee, Road Safety Officer; and
Cr G. Williams, Goulburn Valley Road Safety Council.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
Welcome to the Road Safety Committee public hearings into the country road toll and crashes involving roadside objects. These hearings are public hearings and they are also subject to parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be used against you legally into the future. We take a transcript of the proceedings, and we will provide you with a copy of that transcript in the very near future. Welcome to the hearing. We appreciate your time and effort in coming along today, and we are very much interested in what you have to say. If you like we can hand it across to you. Perhaps you can start by describing what geographical location you cover as the Goulburn Valley Road Safety Council.

Mr McPhee — The shires of Mitchell, Murrindindi, Strathbogie and Mansfield, the City of Greater Shepparton, of course, and the Shire of Campaspe are the area that this road safety council operates through. I should say at this very early stage that hearing some of the previous speakers, particularly from the local government bodies, we have a strong partnership with each of those shires. I think that is a key plus to this sort of association being developed.

Two quick things before we go to the next slide is that we speak about education. An 80-year-old man was travelling along the Hume Freeway between Euroa and Seymour only a week or 10 days ago, travelling at 170 kilometres per hour with a blood alcohol reading of.077, and describing to the police that he was emphatically correct in what he was doing, so there is a need for education. A young lady who was finally getting her opportunity to enter university from Warragul last October/November, was apprehended by a patrol officer brushing her hair with both hands and driving up to the limit of 65 kilometres an hour, and thought it was a joke to be stopped by the policeman to be dealt with in that manner. When she had to be honest with her application to the Western Australian university, she was declined because she had a traffic infringement of that nature.

We go on to the next slide and we talk about region 4, and division 4 includes the shires of Mitchell and Murrindindi, as we explained before, and region 3 includes the shires of Campaspe and Moira and the City of Greater Shepparton. The outcome of a police statistic shown and given to me, and I am pleased to be able have that support, clearly shows the highest contributors to our road toll in these regions are fatigue — and it is written bigger because it holds a higher place on the list — speed and drink-driving, and there is a steady increase of older road users showing up in these statistics. Regional statistics show from the year 2000 in region 4, division 4, we lost 33 lives. In 2001, we lost 33; in 2002, we lost 32; and in 2003, we lost 23.

If we go across to truck involvement, to give you an indication of the trucks that are involved here and why we have a footnote down there, 2 lives were lost involving truck crashes in 2000; 9 in 2001; 6 in 2002; and 4 in 2003. Region 3, division 4, which is pretty close to this area here, 17 lost their lives in 2000; in 2001, 24 lost their lives; in 2002, no different, no improvement, 24; and we have gone up a rung to 25 in 2003. It just gives an indication looking at the state total fatalities on the far right there that we are not doing enough correctly to reduce those statistics. To reduce the road toll and the number of crashes we require some funding to ensure that we have an increase in police and the like.

If we go to the next slide — which will not be easy for you to read, but it is in your handout — there is a document written by a member of the road safety council for the previous 9 or 10 years, Des Wright, who is a senior sergeant and heads up the traffic management unit in this region, and down to a highlighted column two or three from the bottom paragraphs: ‘What I am suggesting is that the community would expect us police to do something concrete about the offending or to remove danger from the public roads. Presently we cannot arrest an offender who is disqualified and/or has a high BAC unless it is in the compliance with section 44 of the Crimes Act’.

If you go to the next slide, in the bottom part of that slide, he has written to me regarding one of his staff apprehending a person who had two prior convictions still current for exceeding.05. On this particular occasion he exceeded the speed limit in the centre of this city, Shepparton, and exceeded it quite severely, and he had a blood alcohol reading of some.210. The officer could only issue him with a summons. He had no power to remove that individual from striking another road user, another family, and creating another statistic.

So the police have a concern, and we certainly have a concern on that behalf. We see there that in the year 2011, and these statistics are very thoroughly correct, the number of licensed older drivers, which is on the increase, is estimated to be that figure of 600 000. I am wondering whether some of these people would need some more education. I believe they do. I think people make some shocking errors on our roads.
If we go to the next slide, funding is desperately needed for these programs, and I think it would be fair to say that it would be a statewide area for the committee and the Parliament to consider. Fatigue, as we illustrated before; speed, we know that speeding and loss of life through speeding is quite horrendous in this area; drink-driving, and there are two programs there that warrant constant support, and that is the program called Looking After Our Mates and the Designated Driver. I have heard councillors, and so have you gentlemen here, say before that most young people are not offending with driving whilst any alcohol or drugs are within their systems. However, that is not quite the same pattern as some of us get a little older. The older road user concern, as the statistics showed just before, is that there are a lot more people out there, some of them with the attitude that you, the rest of the world, owe us, and we need to be respected more, and if they make a little mistake, then sadly — and our statistics show it — the loss of life in double fatalities in this area is in that particular age group.

The CHAIR — Just for your information, this committee has just completed a report into older road users and the issues that surround them.

Mr McPHEE — That is good.

The CHAIR — We have tabled that in Parliament. We would expect that the government would reply to that over the next couple or months or during the next session of Parliament. We will get a copy of the report to you as well. There are about 43 recommendations in there, and a lot would address those issues you are talking about.

Mr McPHEE — They are purely there to highlight the importance of why we are here today. You may not be aware that over 900 vehicles are registered in this region and some of the operators have three figures in those units. That does not mean to say that there is goal catching going on out there to see who can stack up the best and the most B-doubles. There is a huge need for road transport, which is extremely effective in this region. The road safety council has a program directed to transport safety, and it is important that we maintain and encourage the government to provide funding for training — driver training as in driving and operating these units — and that the strategic safety plans that are being put in place by the national bodies as well as local bodies have the support of the current state government.

We are asking you to increase education. You have heard a number of people speak about the education and training facilities that are required. We are not reaching enough people, even with the strength of the Transport Accident Commission, Victoria Police and VicRoads. The volume of advertising that regularly appears is still not reducing the road toll enough. In saying that I should contradict myself by saying that the speed program launched just over 12 months ago by VicRoads and supported by the police and agencies like road safety councils has reduced the number of fatalities in the metropolitan area. We have become a lot more sensible about speeding, including dropping the limits down from 60 kilometres an hour to 50 kilometres an hour, and that has obviously been a plus. But in the country that is not showing; the figures have exceeded last year’s and speeds show up as being higher. So education and training are needed there.

The CHAIR — Are we talking about speed in city centres like Shepparton, or are be talking about speed out on the open roads?

Mr McPHEE — I would have to say both. The police are showing statistics, and one was shown earlier, of people exceeding the highway speed limit by between 30 kilometres an hour and 40 kilometres an hour and saying it is a joke. Where is the joke? Does it stop with the government? The enforcers have to wear it, and they are saying that it is not a joke all. So it is occurring in both cases.

We are hearing a call from the community about the strengthening of enforcement. If there is a police presence somewhere in sight, then the incidents stop. We had a recent TAC campaign, and on night one of a four-night campaign police targeted all sorts of motorists. In the first 2 hours — from 5 o’clock until 7 o’clock — 69 people were charged with not wearing a seatbelt — and that was in this city, one block away from here. I thought not wearing a seatbelt went out with grandfather’s long underpants. There is a continual need for regular seminars to ensure public awareness. We are pleased and proud to say that we have a strong association with and support from every local government body in our service area. The police support us and we have a representative on our council from the Magistrates Court. We are asking you to give the Magistrates Court the continual authority to conduct their business and deal with drivers who are offending and reoffending so that we can see a cessation of that behaviour.
The continual promoting of advertising, including the brochure that I have handed out to you, is a classic example of where community bodies have supported the costs of production. We had 15,000 brochures printed at a four-figure cost. The road safety council did not have the budget to do it, but there was an enormous need because we have students staying here from Melbourne University. They often arrive in the country for the first time and they think it is the same as driving down Bridge Road in Richmond, Elizabeth Street in the city or St Kilda Road where traffic lights give different directions. We have no lights. We have heard people talking about railway crossings, and there is a lack of education and knowledge of those. The brochure was first presented last week, and the response from those young students was amazing.

The CHAIR — Did you say there were no lights in Shepparton?

Mr McPHEE — Not the volume of lights that these students are used to in the suburbs, but there are certainly traffic lights in Shepparton.

The CHAIR — Perhaps I will shift to Shepparton!

Mr McPHEE — You would be welcome. We urge the Parliament to update the rural road legislation because it requires urgent updating in relation to road use behaviour, reoffending by older road users, and the training necessary to ensure that those people who stay with us, stay safely with us, ensuring that the police are empowered and resourced to enforce legislation for all community road users, whether you are a pedestrian, a cyclist or a B-double operator, and that the Magistrates Court is able to act in accordance with the legislation so that after the law is updated the magistrates can apply the necessary rules. Also to provide support for education, and there is a strong need for that. It is important to get those activities out there, because I am sure that you realise that every road death in Victoria costs $1.8 million.

Mr BISHOP — Have you any notes on that? Obviously when you receive our report on older users you might see some of your ideas rolled into it. You talked about road use behaviour, reoffending and older road users.

Mr McPHEE — I highlighted those because that is the area that we are affected by. They are a number of areas that require urgent attention. We can give you some statistics on that. Is that what you want?

Mr BISHOP — Yes.

Mr McPHEE — I can supply those.

The CHAIR — I am interested that you have concentrated on what I would describe as driver behaviour and enforcement. The committee is also looking at road infrastructure, the quality of roads and specifically crashes involving roadside objects — that is, trees and poles. Do either of you have thoughts on that type of thing?

Cr WILLIAMS — Yes, I have quite a list. I was looking at some areas within our shire, because I am on council too. We have a lot of dangerous areas with electricity poles up on the hills. I have noticed a couple of areas in the Strathbogie hills where they are right on the edge of the road, and I am very concerned. Being a member of the PAC committee and a Roadsafe member, I can say that that was what the black spot funding was for. I was wondering whether we would be able to ask the government to put that back, because I have found that mayors, councillors, road safety people and community people come to me all the time and ask why it has gone and whether we can get it back again. So I am asking you whether the black spot funding can be brought back as a priority. We were promised $240 million. I think we received about $140 million and are waiting for the rest. I got off the track a little bit, but getting back to that, we have a lot of problems, especially on our narrow roads. Yes, we have a lot of problems and it causes a lot of angst and costs a lot of lives too.

The CHAIR — The other issue around Shepparton and out towards Mooroopna is that your gravel roads are in what I would describe as a grid-type situation, where you have lots of intersections, and I think of former member for Shepparton Don Kilgour, who often raised with the Road Safety Committee the issue of the grass on those intersections and the clearways of those intersections.

Mr McPHEE — If we get the support of the state and federal government, if that is the case, we need to also have local government, where projects perhaps could be taken on board. We have spoken at the road safety council level at a number of state conferences that projects could be conducted by schools planting a creeper that drops the high grass from around these intersections so that these visitors that we are continuing to get into the area.
do not get caught at these intersections — (a) they do not see them; (b) they do not recognise that there is traffic going both ways, and even with give-way signs and the like, sometimes they have rushed past, or they spot them when it is too late and they take the gamble and run across and find themselves a milk tanker that is doing its regular run, or trains, if we are talking about railway crossings. There is a need, and an important requirement, in our training and in our funding support for the training of people and the development of local government in schools with those crossroads.

Mr STONEY — Like the Chairman, I am also interested in roadside objects and how the committee feels about them. Do you get involved in individual instances or accidents which involve roadside objects, and does the committee get the statistics of accidents within your jurisdiction? Do you have input into identifying which objects may be dangerous and have had consequent accidents, and do you recommend perhaps that something should be done about that?

Mr McPHEE — The TMU, Senior Sergeant Des Wright, who has the role in this police district to supply to police records and often to the coroner his report following fatality accidents or serious crashes has invited me to attend, more recently, a fatality very close to the city, and we do exactly sit down and work out between us what we think may have been the cause or what we think could have contributed to the cause. Why did these people lose their lives? Why did this vehicle get that sort of damage — against the other vehicle, or not? What was the road structure? Was there clear signage? Was there clear vision? Were there any obstructions to the vision? What may the driver have been doing? So I have been unfortunate in regard to attending the scene after the accident, but fortunate enough to gain some experience on what we interpret may have occurred or what may have been wrong, and we make recommendations of lack of signage or lack of quality of signage, or driver error, and I think in the statistics in this city — and I do not have that graph up there, but I can acquire that for you — that 8 of the 25 who lost their lives in this region were lost for driver error or driver not concentrating.

Mr STONEY — Whom do your recommendations go to?

Mr McPHEE — My personal ones are shared with the police officer who in turn delivers them to the state police records and to the coroner, if required.

Mr STONEY — And the committee itself makes recommendations?

Mr McPHEE — The Road Safety Committee?

The CHAIR — Goulburn Valley Road Safety Council.

Mr STONEY — Goulburn Valley Road Safety Council is probably aware of my activity. The report that the TMU sergeant has is certainly not necessarily available at an early stage after the incident while an inquiry is in place.

Mr HARKNESS — I wonder if you could describe for us some of the different programs and perhaps promotional and preventive measures that are in place at the moment or that you would like to put into place to address things like fatigue, drugs, alcohol, mobile phone usage, seatbelts — those sorts of things.

Mr McPHEE — There are a number of programs we do — I think nine in all. Off the top of my head, one comes forward very quickly. The Victorian Country Football League has a partnership with Roadsafe Victoria, which is not Vicroads, which I am sure you are aware of — I hope you are — and we at Goulburn Valley have probably recognised some form of leadership in that program, Looking After Our Mates, and we have some 14 programs ahead of us for district football clubs and basketball clubs — they are sometimes shared in smaller districts — cricket clubs and employer groups in that area. That requires funding, because it is very limited. Travelling around the district, I think there are something like 56 clubs in this region in the Goulburn Valley league alone, close by, and if we are to do the job properly, we should be seeing each and every one of them, but there is no funding to do that. That is one that comes to mind quickly.

To support that we have the fortunate association that we have acquired — and finishing at the end of June this financial year — of in excess of $70 000 worth of goods in kind that support programs like Looking After Our Mates, fatigue and speeding. The channel 10 network, Network Ten Victoria, has made a contribution of in excess of $35 000 worth of air time, and in using that air time those announcements carry a message from three of
probably the league’s, and not necessarily my club’s, best players who are prepared to stand before a television audience and say with all genuineness that fatigue, speed and drink-driving are certainly unacceptable social events.

Mr LANGDON — On the issue of fatigue, what more could we do to assist?

Mr McPHEE — It is a training program where you should take a break every 2 hours on your journey.

Mr LANGDON — Are there things physically on the road we could do — for example, roadside rest areas? Are they adequate?

Mr McPHEE — Of course. Bearing in mind that this is a road safety council, and we have been slapped on the wrist a hundred times for stepping into that area — and I am not prepared to do that here — but I am prepared to say to you and agree with you that, yes, roadside areas, properly designed, safely designed, carrying light, water and parking and safety, and there we would have what are called power nap sites, which Vicroads commenced applying some four or five years ago through this road safety council, I might add, and we have them on the major roads. They are not on the minor roads, however.

Cr WILLIAMS — I spoke at our council to Vicroads hierarchy, and they were very impressed when I brought up about the power nap sites. I have made a suggestion to them — because of the safety of the young ones that should use the power nap sites, but if they are out on the highways they will not pull up and use them — that at the new service centres maybe there should be a designated area where there is protection for people to be able to pull off in those areas to be able to power nap for a time where it is safe, because you get a lot of young girls and young people driving on the highways today and on roads, and they will not pull up because they are too far out of town, and I do not blame them. That is a suggestion that they thought had a lot of merit, that it would be in a safe environment where people would be protected if they did pull up and have that power nap site.

Mr BISHOP — My issue was also fatigue. I am glad to see you had it up in big letters on your presentation. Following up from Craig’s question, the issue seems to be raised with us that people will pull up at the driver reviver stops and have a cup of coffee, but they will not have a sleep; they will drive on. Has your committee had a bit of a look at that and perhaps other issues that are involved with fatigue as well, because we often see local drivers probably falling into the fatigue area who would probably never stop at a driver reviver centre or a roadside stop?

Mr McPHEE — That is a good question. Most people who work at driver reviver sites are volunteers from service clubs like Rotary, Lions and Apex, and the State Emergency Service, who often supply security as in lighting or power et cetera. The aim for all of us who work on those sites is to stop and chat to people, encouraging them to stop. They are getting better at it as we progress along, but it is encouraging people to stop and have a yarn, tell a yarn, if that is the case, argue the issue of football or cricket, or whatever. It stops the bottling up of the bloodstreams and getting the lungs opening and moving again and perhaps encourages them to pull over and have 20 minutes — the power nap program says that even a 10 or 15-minute power nap will allow you to continue another couple of hours of driving even though you are radically tired.

The other issue in our promoting of roadside stops and the like is that we very firmly encourage people not to do a day’s work and then go and drive 600 kilometres on a highway that they know very little about. They have the urge to do 110 kilometres an hour, and the next thing you know they are doing 140 kilometres an hour and the three passengers in the vehicle are asleep. You just wonder how long it takes. How much pushing do we need to do? It is apparent to me, and I hope to you, the successful role of Coles and the like in putting the message before us all. They continually put the message before us. It costs dollars, but it is the successful way of getting a sale, and in our case we are looking at trying to reduce the numbers on our roads.

The CHAIR — Thanks. I am mindful of the time —

Cr WILLIAMS — Could I just raise another issue? We were talking about railway crossings before — and I was talking to Craig about it earlier. People are very concerned about motorised wheelchairs trying to cross crossings, and we have one in Euroa. It is not only in our shire; it is all over Victoria. I have a suggestion: I was wondering whether rumble strips might not be a deterrent. I have noticed rumble strips in some areas up around Benalla where people are coming off a main road onto our main arterial roads. I was wondering whether a wake-up reminder in a lot of those areas might not be a cheaper way of trying to reduce our road toll. Rumble strips give you a wake-up reminder that there is something there. I suggest to the committee that that may have some merit.
The CHAIR — We can take that into account, and of course what you have said will be in the transcript.

Cr WILLIAMS — Thank you. That is about all I have. Thank you for the opportunity.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your time today. Could you leave us the CD? We will provide you with a copy of the transcript. As I said at the outset, we appreciate your time and input into our inquiry.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Shepparton – 18 February 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
Deputy Chair: Mr E. G. Stoney

Staff

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

Witness

Mr B. Corrie.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Before we talk to Brian I would like to acknowledge the presence of a number of parliamentary colleagues — Wendy Lovell, Tony Plowman and Jeanette Powell. Welcome to our hearings. I also welcome a former member, Don Kilgour, who was a very respected and esteemed former member of the Road Safety Committee.

Welcome Brian. I think you probably heard what I said before. You are subject to parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be used against you legally in the future. We are taking a transcript and will provide you with a copy of it. We appreciate your time and input and are interested in what you have to say.

Mr CORRIE — My name is Brian Corrie. I am a resident of the City of Greater Shepparton. I am 60 years of age and because of work and other commitments I have probably driven more kilometres now than most of you will drive in your lifetime. I have nine children, all of whom I have taught to drive, then sent to a driving school to get their licence. When they have come home with the piece of paper I tell them to drive like I taught them, not like they had to to get the piece of paper.

I have extensive experience of driving over most of Australia. I have driven to Perth and been well up into New South Wales. I was in New South Wales on Monday and then came back into Victoria. I want to address the attitude of people and drivers who come into this area and run off roads and hit trees, bridges or whatever else. Cruise control, or automatic pilot as some of us refer to it, is part of the agenda you are covering, as well as signage. I think there is a big problem with signage in most of Australia but particularly in some areas of Victoria. I also want to talk about people learning to drive and judging what they are doing in a motor car — where it is on the road, and how fast they are going.

I learnt to drive in a 1936 Chevrolet. I was taught by a man who used to drive 100 000 miles a year, every year, for 18 years, so he had a lot of experience. When I could drive a 1936 Chevrolet between a tram and a parked car in Victoria Street, Abbotsford at 5 o’clock at night, I was allowed to go to the driving school. To have that sort of control over my children these days is well nigh impossible. They are taught that they have rights from the time they can walk out the door, and you cannot interfere. Yesterday up at the university in New South Wales we were told as parents that because our kids are over 18 years of age unless they give written permission, the university will not contact us. Kids are aware of that. I say that between myself and my youngest, who turns 18 years next month, there are two generation gaps, not one. Part of the problem with messages failing to get to these kids — and I know from my experience with my children — is that they are designed by desk jockeys who have no appreciation of the generation gaps and how advertising, or whatever else, gets to them. My 17 years and 11 months old son, sees a sign indicating 100 kilometres an hour. I am finally getting through to him that that does not mean that you have to drive at 100 kilometres an hour whether it is raining, hailing or the sun is shining.

I take my daughter out on gravel roads, on potholed roads or whatever. I had to find a dirt road that had ruts in so that we could get the car wheels in the rut to stay on the road and not head towards a fence. Since then that girl has driven a lot of kilometres in various cars and never put a scratch on a car, to the best of my knowledge. When she got her licence she had more than 120 hours experience in conditions all over three states and is continually driving. Driver education and the system of getting a licence is a joke.

One of my sons failed his licence test because when somebody drove through a red light, he went to put on the handbrake — although he did not put it on. That was automatic failure for that kid, and he was put in that situation by somebody driving through a red light. One and a half hours later, the same kid driving back to Melbourne to go back to university in my car, avoided the retread coming off the back of a truck which finished up going straight up the bonnet and into the windscreen of the car behind. He had just failed his licence test but he avoided the retread — and I am talking about a truck going in the opposite direction and it came off about 30 metres in front of my car!

The CHAIR — Brian, you mentioned before about cruise control. Do you want to talk about that?

Mr CORRIE — I use cruise control so I do not get booked, but it is a trap.

The CHAIR — In what way?
Mr CORRIE — When I am using cruise control I am aware of what I am doing and what I need to do to retake control of the car. I doubt that many people using cruise control, for the same reason that I use it, are aware of what they have got to do and how quickly they have got to do things to regain control of the car. I would rather all cars were automatically fitted with speed alerts that can be programmed for the speed. They go off and warn you and you are not looking down to see what in hell speed you are doing. You previously talked about the variations between Victoria and New South Wales. I drove as far as Wagga Wagga in New South Wales on Monday. At least when you hit a 50-kilometre sign there it says 50 for the whole section, and that is it. I have a personal view — and to be quite honest, I would like to be paid for it — I think that the present regulations and signage and methods of warning cars in this state are pathetic. Drivers spend more time with their eye off the road looking for signs than they do actually taking notice of what it is going on on that road. There is a way to overcome that. It is not expensive.

Mr BISHOP — In New South Wales they have them, too — and I notice them — you are approaching 60. Do you think that is a good idea?

Mr CORRIE — Yes, it is, because, all right, we talk about, ‘When I am behind the wheel, I am responsible’, or whoever is. You must drive according to the conditions, not so much the sign says I can do that, so that is what I have to do. That is what was enforced on me at a very young age, and I still have it.

I drove to Melbourne recently on the new section of freeway, and in my opinion it was not a 110-kilometre-an-hour strip of road in the conditions I was driving in. I was doing about 100. I could not believe how many people drove past me and looked at me as if to say, ‘You stupid bloody clown, don’t you know this is a 110 zone?’ It is attitude. It is not just in the young ones. It is even in my age group. That makes me pretty bloody mad, actually.

Cruise control is fine. It is a way of avoiding a speeding fine. I think fatigue is up in big letters, and it probably needs to be. It is not always fatigue. I am still in auto pilot mode because I have just driven 2 1/2 hours on a freeway where all I have to do is occasionally turn the wheel a bit because that bend is not quite well banked, and then I suddenly hit traffic going both ways, I have the glare of lights that I have not had for the last 2 1/2 hours. I am not that tired. I am in ‘It’s easy, Fred, mode’. I have been there myself.

Mr LANGDON — It has been suggested that there should be 80-kilometre-an-hour zones for gravel roads instead of 100.

Mr CORRIE — I think something has to be done about it. I am sorry to go on. I had my 17-year-old driving out to a friend’s place at Shepparton East the other day. We go down Hosie Road. It is 60 kilometres an hour. There are houses either side. You then hit a strip of bitumen that is not 2 lanes wide. It has gravel shoulders, table drain and channel either side of it, trucks, tractors whatever at this time of the year driving down it, and the sign says 100. He crosses the road, sees the 100 sign and down goes the foot. I said, ‘Hang on, mate. Do you really need to do 100 down here?’. He said, ‘I suppose not, Dad’. I said, ‘You are going to go 1.6 kilometres, hit a crossroad that is a dangerous crossroad, and if you want to continue on this road, you hit gravel and you hit one of those lovely Goulburn-Murray Water structures about 100 metres further down the road that will make you airborne at 100 kilometres an hour’. He then said to me, ‘Yes, they probably should put a slower sign on here, Dad’.

If you go out here to Raftery Road, Kialla, and take a drive through a 50-kilometre-per-hour zone, less than 200 metres from a single lane bridge is a sign that says 100. That is the legal limit. Another 25 metres from that sign is a sign in yellow with black that indicates it is a single lane bridge. Now you are getting to one of the areas I wanted to get into. I believe too many desk jockeys with very little practical experience of country roads, country cities and their conditions, sit in RTA offices and decide what speed limits are or what happens in an area, and they have never got their burns in the seat of a car and driven down one of those roads. The maps probably do not show them it is a single lane bridge.

Mr LANGDON — Good point.

Mr CORRIE — I am passionate.

The CHAIR — We can see that.
Mr CORRIE — One of my kids riding a motorbike going through a green light, got cleaned up by a bloke who went through a red light. He is alive and in one piece, fortunately. The guy who hit him still was driving around because he had not been convicted for three previous incidents. So I am strongly with the people who say you have got to do something about taking these people off the road somehow before they kill someone. I am sorry if I have taken too much of your time. My only thing about the rest stops is, as I have said to a couple of people, my wife will not stop in them and have what is called a power nap. Until they are safe for people, people are not going to use them to have a power nap. It is the same with your coffee stops. They prop you up for the next 10 minutes and you kill yourself 30 kilometres down the road because you have not had the nap; you have had a cup of coffee that makes you feel like you can do another couple of hours.

The CHAIR — We have had a few organisations say that to us, so that is one issue we do need to — —

Mr CORRIE — I have pulled up at times, driving on my own, with no relief driver, on the side of the road and had a half hour nap. My wife is on the mobile phone wanting to know where the hell I am because I am half an hour later than what I should be getting home. And then, ‘Why did you do that? Somebody could have hit you on the head or robbed you or whatever?’. That is a general attitude.

But if I can say one thing: please get somebody in the advertising game to start working with the generations you have to work with. With the blood and glory ads, my kids get up and walk out of the room. The ones on the freeway are just a distraction that take your eye off the road, and that is where your eye should be, on the road and in the rear vision mirror, worrying about traffic. Thank you.

The CHAIR — I do admire your passion for road safety.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Shepparton – 18 February 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
Deputy Chair: Mr E. G. Stoney

Staff

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

Witness

Mr I. Fisher, Director of Engineering Services, Murray Shire Council.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Thank you for your time and input into the Victorian parliamentary road safety inquiry into the country road toll and crashes involving roadside objects.

We are subject to parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be used against you legally in the future. We are taking a transcript and we will provide you with a copy of it. We appreciate your time. Would you tell us what geographic location the Murray shire takes in?

Mr FISHER — I am the director of engineering services at Murray shire. I was the former shire engineer. I have been at Murray shire for 20 years. I have been a local government engineer for 33 years. Murray shire is an area of 4300 square kilometres or thereabouts. It is a similar size to Campaspe shire, and almost directly opposite Campaspe shire. Moama is our main centre. The Murray River is our southern border. Deniliquin, basically east-west, is our northern boundary, and we go three-quarters of the way to Tocumwal and three-quarters of the way to Barham. In that area probably just over half of it is irrigated under the Murray Irrigation Limited scheme, and there are private irrigation schemes as well.

Mr EREN — What is the population?

Mr FISHER — The population is about 7000, a bit over 4000 in Moama, and we are the fastest growing shire in New South Wales.

As to road safety, I buy the Saturday Age, and looking through it, lo and behold — and I do not normally look at the parliamentary notices, but it caught my eye when it was road crashes. When you live with roads all your life, you respond to those. I drive between southern New South Wales and Victoria. We are Victorian orientated there, for both television and sport and everything. I come out of Victoria as well. So I drive down to Kyabram quite regularly, and on the road I take, as well as the Northern Highway, I guess, for years the level of protection for cars and passengers afforded at irrigation structures has dismayed me.

Having gone through the process that we went through in the mid-1990s when the irrigation schemes in New South Wales were managed by the Department of Water Resources, as similarly they would have been here with State Rivers, in the mid-1990s they were privatised and basically handed over to the irrigators, who each became shareholders, and in that process the state government said, ‘Because the irrigation culverts and bridges are on the roads, and council owns the roads, they are council’s. You look after them’. This happened right across the state, but in that MIA region, the Griffith region, as well as right through our area, and I think there were about 11 councils involved, we started a campaign to counter that and were able to win and indicate that they were not our structures, that they were totally and solely reliant for irrigation schemes. They were put in by them and managed by them, so we were able to win that case. Then subsequent to that we went in to bat for the newly formed irrigation company and said, ‘If you are accepting a government scheme, it has to be up to standard, or if it is not up to standard you need some money to bring it up to standard’.

So there was a dowry, I guess, created or provided by the state government, part of which went to improve their systems, channels and regulators et cetera, but there was also another component that came to improve the road structures. We went through a process then of identifying how many we had, what we had and their value, working with Murray Irrigation. There are seven shires in Murray Irrigation, which takes water out of the Mulwala canal at Lake Mulwala and goes through nearly to Tooleybuc. It has 3000 kilometres of channel, 1500 kilometres of drainage channels and covers an area of 790 000 hectares. I do not know how that fits with Murray-Goulburn or the irrigation trust. That is not Coleambally or MIA; those councils up there did their own thing. So we were able to justify a dowry which was paid over a five-year period, and I think Murray shire got something like $860 000 from the government to assist us. Then we prioritised the projects that we needed, and that lasted through until 2001 or something like that.

Then the irrigator component kicks in and a proportion of their water fees or allocation fees goes towards maintenance, and then a dividend comes back to look after the council projects. We probably do six to eight structures a year. Murray Irrigation tends to prefer to liaise with us on the prioritising of them; we then provide a quotation, it endorses it and we undertake the work or get a contractor in.

The CHAIR — What type of work are you talking about?

Mr FISHER — Mainly guardrail — taking off timber rails and pipe rails that are invariably about chest height and can easily spear cars and then putting on guardrail. That is what we are doing. I see the issues over this
side of the river. There are some photos in my report, and I will just talk to them as we go through. This one is on the Murray Valley Highway east of Echuca. If anyone knows that area, it is called the Bay of Biscay. It is a major drain that runs out of Tongala. When I took the photos and put in the submission I picked up on these bridges in the Bay of Biscay, and there are two there.

**The CHAIR** — So the Bay of Biscay is in Victoria?

**Mr FISHER** — It is in Victoria. We are talking Vicroads.

**Mr LANGDON** — I hope so because there is a Vicroads sign here.

**Mr FISHER** — This is a Vicroads sign. So since last October or whenever I put in the submission there has been $620 000 worth of work done on road widening to extend the width of the seal outside the edge line — if you compare those photos to the ones in there. I do not know what it has done; it has probably done 5 or 6 kilometres of edge widening. It is excellent. It is a shame it could not have been used on some guardrail. If you go over the page you will see the Bay of Biscay. The two on the second page are the western and eastern approaches. There is a concrete abutment within 2 feet of the edge line, and it is unprotected. It is the most lethal thing that you could come across, and it is a Vicroads project. It is a black spot project, and no-one had the guts to twig that it might be a problem. I cannot believe it. I could not believe it when I put in a submission the first time, and then $620 000 was spent there and did not fix the biggest lethal hassle on that section of road.

**Mr BISHOP** — So that is the bottom photo on the second page?

**Mr FISHER** — They are both the same bridge, but on the bottom one you can see that the edge line would not be 2 feet away. I was not game enough to get out on the road to take the photo; there was too much traffic. So that is the classic.

Over the page and a bit further westward — I think it is still in the same zone where the widening has been done — there is some guardrail, and I will just talk briefly about each so you understand the problem. I would like to do that. The edges have been done and the guardrail has been painted. The guardrail is substandard. It should have melt ends — that is the soft metal round pieces. It does not show clearly, but on the right-hand side the guardrail is sitting on the ground. It is meant to be 790 millimetres above the top of the ground.

**Mr STONEY** — Is that new work?

**Mr FISHER** — Someone has painted the guardrail.

**Mr STONEY** — But it is not newly installed?

**Mr FISHER** — No, it is not newly installed; it has been there for years, but I think because they did the road, they painted it.

**Mr EREN** — Why would it be required there?

**Mr FISHER** — Undoubtedly there is a drain or something like that. It does not show up in the photo, but there is a drain or a channel there which probably needs protection. I am just saying that the protection is not up to today’s standard but falls well short of it. This is on a B-classification highway; it is not a little shire road.

I then went about 10 kilometres east of Kyabram where my wife and I regularly go dancing. We go down a road called Scobie Road. It runs from the Murray Valley Highway down to the Kyabram to Echuca Road, just west of Kyabram. I went out there the other day and took a photo of every channel crossing on a 10 kilometre section of road. At the top of the road I would guess it would have 500 vehicles a day and the southern end could have 1000 vehicles a day over that 10-kilometre road. The top photo is fairly typical. There is no reflector on it — —

**Mr LANGDON** — It appears that this is the only section of the road where there have been problems with the bridge or the drainage or whatever — —

**Mr FISHER** — There is a bit of road failure there; I can talk to you about that later.

**Mr LANGDON** — That would add to the danger of crossing that section of road?
Mr FISHER — Probably by the time you hit that you would miss the bridge. You would be going off the road before you got there. I am particularly concerned about the lower photo, where you have this pipe rail at chest height. You could probably shake with your hand the bit of pine post that is on the edge of the culvert. If you bump that out of the way the pipe rail would be straight through the front of the car. If you go down the road a bit further and look at the photo at the top of the next page, at least the rail has been painted white and there is one reflector; that is good. Down a bit further there is an unprotected edge that would rip the bottom end of your car. A little bit further, at least there is the white paint and one reflector plus the chevrons, so that is getting a little bit better, but there is exactly the same pipe rail arrangement.

If you go over the page — —

Mr LANGDON — This is my favourite one.

Mr FISHER — This is a Campaspe shire requirement. In the bottom photo you can see that there is a cattle race under the road. It would be not dissimilar to a channel. It does not have water and you cannot drown in it. I reckon 46 metres to 50 metres of guardrail is provided, and that is excellent. That is the sort of standard that is required today. The only little incidental remark I would make is that if you look at the top photo, the melt end as we call it, the bull nose — —

Mr LANGDON — Is behind the tree.

Mr FISHER — It is behind the gum tree.

Mr LANGDON — We do not want it to get hit!

Mr HARKNESS — Why would they do that?

Mr FISHER — I do not know. The contractor was told to go and fix up the guardrail, and he went up and did it.

Mr EREN — That could have been before the tree was put in.

Mr FISHER — That is an old tree. I would say the guardrail has probably been in for four years. It looks as if a limb has fallen off the tree and dented it a bit.

Mr STONEY — Are we talking Vicroads here?

Mr FISHER — No, this would be a shire road and a local road; it is not a main road. All I am indicating is if a private land cocky next door is trying to improve his dairy farm, he has to put into probably $15 000 to $20 000 — or it could be more, $25 000 — worth of guardrail to today’s standards; yet you have an irrigation authority that flouts it and a road authority that does not require it. There are lots of complications.

The next one is a gravel road each way. It is not always easy to put guardrail on, and there you have a gate right beside the bridge and an intersection. You often have to compromise on the length of guardrail that you have approaching, I am saying, when you do things.

Continuing down the road, the next one is quite a major channel. I am guessing it is about 14 metres wide. I did not get out and measure it — — exactly the same pipe rail. In our system that would have a fairly high severity index. The risks associated with going into that channel and drowning — it would be over 1.2 metres deep — — that is how we rank it. It has no better protection.

The CHAIR — With these issues, do you as the engineer in Murray shire conduct road safety audits? Do you actively go out there and look — —

Mr FISHER — We do a risk assessment on our roads. Regional roads are done every 6 months, I think, and sealed shire roads, 12 months, and back roads — —

The CHAIR — Is that a legal requirement or a formal requirement?

Mr FISHER — No, it is just a self-protection, save-your-butt requirement. Since malfeasance or nonfeasance has gone out the window, we do that. I do that. You are forever looking.
Mr BISHOP — Digressing just a bit, your comment that malfeasance and nonfeasance have gone out the window, that is in your state?

Mr FISHER — Yes. I do not know if it is in yours or not, but it is in ours.

Mr BISHOP — Can we pursue that a little further now?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr BISHOP — With that happening in New South Wales, have you now got a road management hierarchy where responsibility is allocated to various authorities?

Mr FISHER — No, it has not changed to that extent, I do not think. Our council has responsibility for the regional roads and the local roads, and the Road Traffic Authority has responsibility for highways and State Roads.

Mr BISHOP — If you go back a bit in Victoria, nonfeasance has now been extended until the middle of this year when we will, we think, put a road management bill into place which establishes responsibility levels between Vicroads and the municipalities, but prior to that if a truck went through a bridge, it was generally assumed the municipality was not liable, but with that change they were liable.

Mr FISHER — That is right.

Mr BISHOP — Who is liable where you are now?

Mr FISHER — Murray shire. Me, in some respects.

Mr BISHOP — Who is responsible if a car hits a tree?

Mr FISHER — This is where we do a risk assessment of the road. We do a safety inspection of the road. It is a bit like footpaths and trees in caravan parks that we own and things like that. So long as you make a reasoned assessment, you have inspected it, you have documented that you have inspected it, you have documented what action you have recommended and what actions have taken place, the loop goes around, so at least you make a value judgment on it from some sort of professional experience.

Mr BISHOP — If you transpose those particular channel guards into your area — you say it would not happen there, but say it did were and someone injured themselves on that, who would be responsible in your shire? Would it be the water authority or yourselves? [ or — — ]

Mr FISHER — They would probably take us both on, but we are saying it is the water authority’s responsibility. The irrigation structures are their responsibility, and that is spelt out in our deed of agreement.

Mr BISHOP — And that would be the same for service facilities like power poles?

Mr FISHER — Yes.

Mr BISHOP — Same principle?

Mr FISHER — I believe so, yes. It gets a bit messy if we have approved some works and it is deemed to be unsatisfactory or something like that.

Mr BISHOP — I understand that.

Mr FISHER — The last one on Scobie Road is just another channel right down the end near Kyabram Road, and again it is a medium-size channel, probably 8 metres across or something like that. There is a fair sort of concrete abutment there. It would be guarddrailed under our system, put it that way.

Mr BISHOP — So your audit would pick that up; that is what you are saying?

Mr FISHER — Yes. Because it is an irrigation structure, we would have picked that up probably eight years ago, anyway. If it is one of our own bridges and it has pipe rail on, that should have been picked up three years ago and put into a works process.
Mr EREN — The water authority does not do the audits? They do not check their bridges or culvert?

Mr FISHER — No.

Mr EREN — You find it and you say to them bring them up to standard?

Mr FISHER — On the water authority channels, we are jointly doing it. They come forward with some suggestions because they want works done because perhaps the structure is not up to scratch or not big enough to handle the water they need to push through or that sort of thing, and we are saying, ‘No, this road has so much traffic on it. It has the school bus’, whatever we think ought to be done. Fortunately, there has basically been enough money there to do sufficient along the way.

The next three or four pages are ones within our shire. This is a photo that was part of the Mulwala canal. You can see it is probably 15 metres wide. That is what it was back in 1996 or something like that. It was one of the first we did — timber post and rails; no different to what you have over the river here in Victoria. The bottom is guardrailled, and it has thriebeam. That is the additional strength W beam. It is a heavier grade of guardrail across the bridge proper.

Mr LANGDON — Is that a line next to it?

Mr FISHER — No, that is their solar panel to control their telemetry system so they can adjust the gates on it. It is not only a bridge; it is also a regulator for the channel system.

The CHAIR — Are you saying those are before and after photos?

Mr FISHER — Yes, the top one is a before and the bottom one is an after. The top photo would have been taken in about 1994 or 1995 or something like that. There it is — 24.4.1994. The top one is only a recent photo, but that work would have been done probably in 1997 or 1998 or something like that. What I am saying is that for that size channel we deemed it needed this thriebeam on.

The CHAIR — What type of cost were you looking at there — ballpark figures?

Mr FISHER — For that larger structure, $22 000; $15 000 is a standard bridge. The next two or three pages — —

Mr BISHOP — We heard at one hearing that it was $100 a lineal metre for a guardrail.

The CHAIR — That is right.

Mr FISHER — That is a bit bigger bridge and higher traffic volume, so it is probably slightly longer, but we put 12 metres of guardrail on either end, plus the width of the channel proper. So it has 24 metres, so that is 48 on the approaches, plus whatever the width of the bridge is.

Mr LANGDON — You also said there is guardrail — I cannot remember the expression you used. It was stronger guardrail, was it not?

Mr FISHER — The middle one, yes. It is called thriebeam. The W beam is the normal one. It is like a W. It has an extra rib on it.

Mr LANGDON — I assume that is more expensive?

Mr FISHER — Yes, it would be at least 50 per cent more, plus you have a transition piece to come back from the three to the two.

Mr HARKNESS — Could you use brefen wire, instead of the steel gauge, or is it not worth it?

Mr FISHER — I think they are too short a length. It would be like trying to strain up a fence that is only 30 metres long. I think you need longer runs. You have to curve them away from the road because often the roads are only 6.8 metres or 7.4 metres wide. With the guardrail width and the approach you are probably up to 10 metres to 12 metres wide.
Mr LANGDON — I was told the same thing about guardrails.

Mr FISHER — Yes, but you do not want it strong; you want it collapsible. The next two or three photos show shire roads that are unsealed. We have done all our bitumen roads, and just to give you a comparison to what you saw before on Scobie Road, this photo shows some guardrail which is well painted, with chevrons and several reflectors, but it was on a tight curve and we deemed it a risk and so we have subsequently guardrailed it. Those are the before and after photos. The next is a before and after photo of a fairly straight gravel road. There is a bit of complication with road access and things like that either side. On the last photo you will see that we have placed a higher rail just out of 100 by 50 RHS to permit stock to walk across and not jump over the guardrail; guardrail tends to be too low for stock, so we often do that.

So this is the comparison between where we are at and what I am seeing over this side of the river. Coming back to the standards, we had a lot of difficulty determining what standard of guardrail and/or not guardrail to put up. When do you put it up and when is it acceptable just to have guide posts? There are seven shires involved with Murray Irrigation’s area. In the middle 1990s we regularly met to look at the standards because the Ausroads standards did not really cover it properly; there was no RTA advice down to the level of road that we are talking about — little outback shire roads — including what is a bridge and a culvert. Some culverts under roads are not very wide but the channel is quite wide, so in effect it looks like a bridge but it is only a culvert. We came up with our schedules 1 and 2 that I submitted. We consider the severity index, which is to do with the depth of water and the traffic, the speed of the traffic and the standard of the road. So we have them for regional roads, which are main roads in Victoria, until they change to regional roads in New South Wales and feeder roads, which are major roads. Then we have higher class local roads and just the local L2 and L3s, which are a bit of gravel or no gravel at all.

We have 201 structures. You can go through the books; we have plenty that look like the ones in the photos, but they are on back tracks, which would not have 20 cars a day on them. We have started; we have done all our bitumen roads. We started with the wider channels where there was greater width and depth — higher volume roads. We are now getting down to other roads. We felt that, if we developed something as a regional group and had Murray Irrigation’s concurrence and had some considered opinion behind us, we were covered if someone had an accident and said, ‘This is not in accordance with this or that’. We felt that there was at least a collective logic behind it. I am not saying that what we are doing will stand up in a court of law; we have not tested it yet, but at least it is a common approach across the region. We are mindful of the dollars because we have only put 12 metres of approach guardrail on and assumed that that is adequate for what we are trying to protect.

Mr EREN — So since these works were begun and have been completed has there been a dramatic reduction in fatalities or injuries?

Mr FISHER — We looked at the risks rather than the statistics. I am not sure that there were any deaths, certainly not in our shire. I am not sure there were any elsewhere; it was the potential.

The CHAIR — So you have minimised the risks?

Mr FISHER — Yes.

Mr BISHOP — Could I ask for a bit of comparison? In your shire if you do your safety audit and you see a tree that you consider is in a dangerous position, how do you go about the next process? Let us say that you believe it needs to be removed. What is the process?

Mr FISHER — If it is a grey box tree or a yellow box tree we have to get permission from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources. That is the newly named department in New South Wales that covers water, land and resources. They inspect it and recognise it. If it is considered a safety issue it is not an issue; we take it out. As part of the process, we are taking out quite a number of trees.

Mr BISHOP — And that is your assessment?

Mr FISHER — That is just our assessment on the volume of traffic on the road, the speed and perhaps the locality to a corner — —

Mr BISHOP — What is the RTA’s level of input to that?

Mr FISHER — On local roads, nil.
Mr BISHOP — Nil?

Mr FISHER — They are only involved on state highways. Even the main roads would be our responsibility. They provide us with funding to assist us in maintaining the main road or regional roads.

The CHAIR — So where a tree or a roadside object is recognised as a hazard, there is no question: the tree comes out.

Mr FISHER — Yes. We do not take them out unless we have to, but these are shire roads that go around a big gum tree or that sort of thing. We take them out now — trees that have reflectors on.

Mr BISHOP — Would you put a guardrail on some?

Mr FISHER — Cost-benefit. There is no shortage of trees in most areas up our way.

Mr EREN — Having a look at some of these pictures, you do not see many trees!

Mr FISHER — So it is not a problem.

Mr BISHOP — To confirm that again, on the state roads the RTA has the responsibility, but on the declared roads and the other local roads it is your responsibility to assess the safety requirements, and then it is the other infrastructure department that comes in if it is a particular sort of tree. Other than that, it is your responsibility to go ahead as of right to do it.

Mr FISHER — Yes.

The CHAIR — Ian, thank you for your time and input.

Mr FISHER — I certainly do not underestimate the cost that could be involved. I am not saying that it is not being done. I came into Shepparton on the Nathalia road and the first two or three channels out of Shepparton are well guardrailed; it is not an issue. There does not seem to be a connection between the shire and Vicroads and the water authority. The water authority seems to be doing the maintenance, and I do not think it is familiar with the Australian road standards or the road authority’s requirements; that is what I am saying.

Mr BISHOP — So that is a communication or a structural issue?

Mr FISHER — Yes.

Mr BISHOP — That they should work together to ascertain the standards, disseminate the responsibility and proceed?

Mr FISHER — I suppose I am under parliamentary privilege, so I can say it. I spoke to Ralph Kop, the engineer from Campaspe shire, I gave him a copy of the submission that I had put in, and I said, ‘Nothing seems to be being done about it in your shire’, and he said, ‘It is too big a problem. It is too expensive’. Where do you start? All I am saying is that they spend about $80 000 a year in our shire on irrigation guardrailing.

Mr STONEY — Would you say the problem is historic where Victoria has not done a lot and for some reason has got behind? Would you say that is part of it?

Mr FISHER — I would say when Murray Goulburn took it over from the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission somebody should have thought about it then and told the State Rivers, ‘You bring them up to scratch before we take it over’.

Mr BISHOP — It is still a government agency. That assessment probably should have been made there, but it is not like your water authorities over there. This is still a government agency.

Mr FISHER — Basically.

Mr STONEY — This is a bit subjective, but are all the New South Wales councils along the river as good as Murray or are you outstanding in your field?
Mr FISHER — We like to think we are ahead of the game. The shires that were involved with this were Corowa, Berrigan and Wakool. They are all Murray River shires.

Mr STONEY — Do you think you are all about equal in your proactive work?

Mr FISHER — I would doubt it, no. I do not want to put tickets on myself, but I agree we would be ahead of the game. Sorry, I do not think we are doing well enough anyway. We would like to have more resources to do it, but I do not think others have got road safety inspection programs.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Ian. We appreciate your time, and we will provide you with copy of the transcript in due time.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Shepparton – 18 February 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
Deputy Chair: Mr E. G. Stoney

Staff

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

Witnesses

Mr B. Girgis, Manager, Engineering Services; and
Mr N. Cook, Assets Officer, Benalla Rural City Council.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to Bassim Girgis and Norm Cook of the Benalla Rural City Council. Thank you for your time and input. As you are aware, this is an inquiry into the country road toll and crashes involving roadside objects.

We take transcript and will provide you with a copy of it. You are under parliamentary privilege, which means what you say cannot be used against you legally, so go for it. Again, welcome and, Bassim, you have some overheads there, so we will hand over to you.

Overheads shown.

Mr GIRGIS — Honourable members of the committee, it is a privilege to be here and present to you our view on the inquiry. Norm was acting in my position while I was away, and he did write to you last time when the inquiry was first started, and he is the one that got me into that. Thank you, Norm. Nevertheless, I think having an input into this inquiry we see as being important, and thanks for inviting us.

What I did as a starting point was to collect some statistics to aid me in being able to assist as to whether it is a problem or not. I have submitted the statistics to yourselves and also submitted a full copy of the presentation, and they are out of crash stats from VicRoads.

I am Bassim Girgis. I am the manager of engineering services at the Benalla Rural City Council. Road Safety is a must. Today I am going to talk to you about a number of topics. The first one is crash statistics straight out of VicRoads. I am trying to understand what that is really telling us about rural cities — trees on roadsides and the clear zone issues; vegetation removal and planning permit requirements, ownership of native vegetation on roadside and liability issues, and lastly, funding for the installation of guardrails. We are obliged to provide guardrail protection on high embankments over 3 metres so that even when a member of the public hits it we can save a life instead of losing a life in a car.

The next slide shows crash statistics from 1 January 1987 to 31 December 2002. I did not manipulate them. I took them as they are here but focused on what we are talking about — accident type and fixed objects hit and the casualties. Eighty eight point eight percent of casualties relate to cars hitting fixed objects. The next slide shows collisions with fixed objects — the type, the count and the percentage. There were 22 fatal collisions in the period in the Benalla Rural City Council area. At the time it was part of a bigger council — Delatite — which comprised Benalla and Mansfield. There were 135 seriously injured casualties, which represented 47.2 per cent. More than 50 per cent were serious injuries or fatalities. Other injuries accounted for 45.1 per cent.

With traffic controls I focused on whether the accidents were happening at traffic lights or on open roads; that was another issue. So no controls — that is you are driving in the middle of the road between intersections or on a highway and there are no traffic lights, no give-way signs and no stop signs — 94.4 per cent of accidents hitting objects occurred in that setting. Some control lights accounted for 6.6 per cent.

Summary by suburbs. Eighty five point seven per cent of accidents happened in the rural sector of Benalla — that is not the small towns but the farming sector. In hamlets or small towns like Benalla it is 14.3 per cent. So far that tells me that my major problem is not in cities but between the towns as a car leaves the town and travels on the highway to somewhere else — that is where accidents happen.

I have included two speed zones — 100 kilometres an hour, which is the law of the land anywhere where it is not signed and is not a freeway, and 72.4 per cent of accidents happen in our shire on those roads. Only 16.1 per cent of accidents happen on freeways which are 110 kilometres an hour. I would like you to think about funding allocation in relation to accidents. VicRoads only has 16.1 per cent of the problem; we have 72.4 per cent of the problem.

Mr EREN — So you think that if you put traffic lights on the freeways and increase the speed limits we will reduce the accident toll?

Mr GIRGIS — That is not what I was trying to say. I have looked at the objects that cars hit. There are a lot of objects, but I have just looked at a few. Only 1.4 per cent hit power poles, but 52.9 per cent of accidents occur where cars leave the road and hit a tree. Fences and walls account for 10.2 per cent. Cars leaving or hitting embankments account for 7.8 per cent; guide posts, 4.4 per cent; and the rest were 2 per cent here, 2 per cent there and 1.4 per cent there, which add up to 23.3 per cent.
The next slide shows an issue that I heard you start to tease out with the gentleman from New South Wales — trees on roadsides and the clear zone issue. Are we all sure of what a clear zone is? A clear zone is set dependent on the speed of a car travelling on a road. So if it is 110 kilometres an hour, the clear zone would be bigger — I do not have the figure here with me. If it is only 100 kilometres an hour it is less; if it is 60 kilometres an hour the clear zone is smaller. I think I need 4 metres from the edge of the wheel pass at 100 kilometres an hour.

On the importance of tree corridors along roadside and creeks, I am aware of the importance of trees. I was a member of a group that started planting trees in New South Wales; I love trees. I like looking at trees, but at the same time we have people who live, work and travel on the roads, and we need to look after them. We have invaded the land. We need to be able to accommodate ourselves as well as the trees. Trees on corridors along roadsides are important. There are two major corridors for flora and fauna; one of them is roadsides and the other is creeks. How do I accommodate cars and trees at the same time? That is the challenge. Conflict with traffic is a major issue.

The clear zone and implementation in various speed zones: I have just talked about how the various speed zones and the clear zones vary. You will be discussing this with lots of other local governments, but in order for us to implement a clear zone, I cannot clear all the trees like our friends and predecessors in the past did, but by the same token, as a local government we cannot afford to cut all the trees. So when we think that a tree is within a zone of influence or within a clear zone, we need to do a risk assessment to check whether or not that tree should go. Nevertheless we need to address the clear zone issue. Studies were done on clear zones in the 1960s and 1970s in America — and do not take my word for it, but I believe that Vicroads are adopting them, so the clear zone issue may need to be refreshed — showing exactly how much clearance I need at different speeds.

I will talk about the cost of implementation versus government funding. We cannot afford to completely clear trees in order to make the road safer, so we assess the risk, which is the probability of the accident multiplied by the consequences. Speed and traffic come into the equation.

**The CHAIR** — Perhaps I am jumping the gun here, but does Benalla Rural City Council therefore go out and proactively conduct road safety audits?

**Mr GIRGIS** — We are doing that. Our roads have a six-weekly investigation. There are two types of assessment on our roads. Six-weekly on all our network, and then we a safety assessment as well when the public brings issues to us. Between those periods we cannot guarantee that a limb has not fallen somewhere. I cannot be everywhere at the same time, but a routine inspection takes place. We are in the process of formalising that through our road asset management plan in line with the new road management bill. Am I right to say that?

**Mr COOK** — And improving all the time.

**Mr GIRGIS** — But at the moment we have that in place.

Vegetation removal and planning permit requirements: the reason I am here is because of that issue. Changing legislation is what I am here for. Conflicting objectives: vegetation versus traffic safety. Native trees require the submission of planning permits which are issued by council, with the referral authority being DSE — that is, the engineers put a planning permit to the planners in council saying, ‘I would like to remove four trees, please, because they are in my way’. They have to then go to the Department of Sustainability and Environment to get approval for them to remove these trees. If the application is approved, the trees are removed, and it is compensated. If it is a lime stringy bark, we have to put 100 trees in instead of one, so I planted something like 17 000 trees only last year because we had to do a timber road. So there is compensation. If the application is refused or partly refused — that is, if they say, ‘Yes, you can move three, but you cannot move that one’ — the tree stays. I put the question before you: who is responsible for that tree? As I am speaking to you now, if it is a lime stringy bark, I could not remove it. It is in my way. It is that far away from the edge. It is not a sealed road; it is a gravel road. I have to put a couple of posts around it to make sure that people at night can see it. Who is responsible for that tree? If I am responsible for the road, which I am, and I am acting responsibly towards my road, I will shut the road, but I have residents and I have got the timber industry. We have spent $1 million on that road to improve it for tyres.

On the need to change the legislation to give the road authorities the freedom to act appropriately, providing all alternative avenues are exhausted — in order for me to act appropriately, I need to put up a guardrail. To put a guardrail across the tree, the guardrail sticks out 500 millimetres plus the setting behind it. If the road is 6 metres,
then I have a road width of 3½ to 4 metres and I am putting a timber truck on it, and a vehicle, two-way, which means a guardrail is out of the question. I cannot do it because there are trees on this side and there are trees on this side and the road is in between. I need to act in freedom in order for me to apply my duty of care towards the public. I need to have the freedom, legally, to act in order to provide safety for the people. If I cannot do that, who is responsible?

I would like to show you this first. This is what the road should look like, the top picture. I have a clear zone. I have a shoulder, a verge and a clear zone. That car there is at the bridge, and when you get to it, that is what you see. That is what you see when you get to the bridge. It is the same. This is where the car is; it is where the picture on the bottom is. You have a nice clear road, and then you have a creek crossing there with a bridge, and you have trees encroaching there — from there to there. These trees are well and truly within the clear zone. The butts of the trees are straight away on the edge of the seal. There is no question about this. They need to be removed.

Mr EREN — That was a 100-kilometre-an-hour speed limit?

Mr GIRGIS — Yes, that is the highway. It is a main road, the Benalla-Tatong Road.

The CHAIR — In the example there, is that within your shire, of trees not being able to be removed because it is a —

Mr GIRGIS — Have we applied for removal of that?

Mr COOK — I do not think we have, but the issue that comes about is the fact that to get approval to remove those trees could be very difficult. We recognise that they are well established, old, valuable trees, but it is a road that has large B-double timber trucks, it has school buses, it has everybody travelling in and out, and there is no point in widening the narrow bridge, which itself creates a problem as it is now, because behind it you have the narrow road with the trees. It is more a case of it would be nice if we removed those trees, for safety, but the process of going through it is so —

Mr EREN — So a short-term solution could not be that you would reduce that part of it to 80 kilometres?

Mr COOK — The section just before this, just north of there, is an 80 zone. It is leading into the town. It is an option that could be done. It is more of a concern. I was talking to a person this morning who lives there who says, ‘If there is a truck coming the other way, I stop before the bridge. I do not like to meet a truck on the bridge’.

Mr GIRGIS — I have a picture of police track on my computer. When I finish the presentation, I will pick that up and show you the tree. It is on G drive. I might not have it here, sorry. Here is another example. Here is a tree that is really on the edge of the road, a mature tree. It is probably a good 100 years old. It needs to be taken out. A guardrail is not always the solution. If you put a guardrail there, you have eaten half or a quarter of the width of the road. It is a straight section. You cannot even string the whole road this way, because in the course of stringing the road this way it is going to be tremendous, 100 or something like that, for that tree.

That brings me to the issue of ownership of native vegetation on roadsides, and that is a liability issue. Trees on roadsides are an important asset, and we acknowledge that as council. We know that they form part and parcel of the flora and fauna — the remaining flora and fauna in that area. Maybe that corridor is the only corridor of that type of species in that area. The ownership of this asset is unclear. In the case of the road reserve belonging to the Crown — it is Crown land — council exercises a duty of care in maintaining the road reserve to ensure public safety is achieved. This road is hindered by the current process, by the conflict of legislation governing local government and the Department of Sustainability and Environment. Under the Local Government Act I have to exercise a duty of care towards the public by providing a safe environment for them to travel. Under the planning and environment act I have to adhere to the planning permit issue. In police track, and I am mentioning that as an example, I have a contract there and I cannot get to act as an officer. Please tell me what to do.

The other thing I would like to speak about on the previous slide is that we maintain a safe road for the public. Who maintains the rest? If the road reserve is 20 metres and I am maintaining 10 metres in the middle, that is 6 metres of road and 2 metres each side of that road for limbs falling down on cars or whatever, who looks after the trees outside that if it is that important to DSE? They do not. I do not. Who looks after them?
Mr BISHOP — It is the same philosophy with weeds — the roadsides are owned by the Crown, but the responsibility for the weeds on roadsides is the adjacent landowner’s.

Mr GIRGIS — That is right.

Mr BISHOP — Which is a conflict immediately, because it is very difficult, I would suggest, to take an adjacent land-holder to court because he or she has not done the weeds when it is not their land. It is a similar philosophical — —

Mr GIRGIS — What happens if he has an accident doing the weeds? Is the Department of Sustainability and Environment responsible for that?

Mr BISHOP — That is the other issue as well.

Mr GIRGIS — It is a liability issue. That needs to be clarified in legislation so we know where we stand from each other. It is a classic, because we want to be able to together get somewhere, not individually. If we can get there together, we are winning. It is a win–win situation. Sorry for being a bit forceful about it.

Mr BISHOP — When you get to the road management bill, you are going to, and so is government, I suspect, have to make a judgment on this, are you not, or are we not, as a community?

Mr GIRGIS — As a defined responsibility?

Mr BISHOP — Yes.

Mr GIRGIS — I am not sure that is addressed in the bill.

Mr COOK — It is something that we have to look at because the issue it also raises is whether if council plants native vegetation as against naturally occurring vegetation on road reserves it is liable if something happens in the future. That is an issue that we are not addressing, and it will have to be sorted.

Mr GIRGIS — The demarcation of responsibilities in the bill as I understand it today — and I need to read a little bit more about it — is a more physical demarcation in relation to boundaries. That is, Vicroads will maintain that section of road including that part of the intersection, and I maintain the rest of it. But I do not think it goes to the same parcel of land where two authorities are maintaining it.

Mr BISHOP — But if it starts to address the issue of nonfeasance, which it needs to do in the middle of this year when the nonfeasance exemption runs out, I would suspect that that would be one of the major issues.

Mr GIRGIS — That is right. Is this a forum where I ask you to extend the nonfeasance?

Mr BISHOP — It was extended.

Mr GIRGIS — The installation of guardrails along embankments is another issue. A person in a car leaving an embankment would hurt or kill themselves as they leave an embankment, but the reality is that if you do not have a guardrail, they hit the tree as they go down and that is what will kill them; not the embankment. That is why we are supposed to put guardrails around embankments. We are a flatter shire. Nevertheless, we do have embankments. When we were part of the Delatite shire we had Mount Buller and the high country. We did not have Mount Buller itself; but we had its approaches. The black spot program only addresses black spots — that is, there have to be three fatalities in five years in order for me to get money to do a black spot. I want to take a proactive approach to that. I want to do a risk management on each of those corners. I say, ‘Fund us for black spots so we do not get to the black spot issue. Still place priorities, but look at funding us for black spots’. We cannot afford it, and the rate base that every local government has is not big enough.

I was talking about prevention rather than cure. I would like to see the black spot program continued, and perhaps you could pursue the government to continue the program, which ends next year. On top of that I would like some extension for potential grey spots.
We talked about crash statistics, trees on roadsides and the clear zone issue, vegetation removal and the planning requirement issue. I ask you to change the legislation governing that issue and the ownership of native vegetation on roads. I ask you to extend the black spot program and provide some money to the grey spot areas.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Bassim.

Mr LANGDON — How big is the newly created Benalla Rural City Council area? I am trying to find out how big you are on the map.

Mr COOK — I think about 2500 square kilometres.

Mr LANGDON — How many people?

Mr COOK — About 25000.

Mr LANGDON — Is it correct that you broke away from Delatite shire?

Mr GIRGIS — Yes.

Mr LANGDON — And you are the northern section?

Mr GIRGIS — Yes, we are.

Mr STONEY — Devolution of the shire.

Mr LANGDON — I remember it happening. We have maps of the area.

Mr STONEY — Mansfield got all the embankments.

Mr GIRGIS — We are the Benalla Rural City Council. We do not have the demarcation that it has.

Mr COOK — It is about halfway. Benalla is the narrow section at the top, and it flares out to cover Mansfield.

Mr GIRGIS — It is almost at the line that separates the chasm from civilisation.

The CHAIR — Are there any further questions of Bassim? We have asked a few as we have gone along.

Mr BISHOP — I very much appreciate the issues that you have raised, and I think they cut right home to the very nub of what we are wrestling with as well. I still think that the issues will have to be picked up in the road management bill, because otherwise there is going to be a level of responsibility generated by that bill where there will be an opportunity to do that. If nonfeasance is removed, it will almost have to be done. How much work have you done on that bill?

Mr GIRGIS — We have done quite a bit of work. I am very much conversant with the bill. The issue at hand is that the bill will not change the planning and environment acts: it will be in conflict with them. The bill will tell me that I am responsible for the road. So do I write a letter to the Department of Sustainability and Environment and say, 'You have refused the removal of this tree. Can you please waive all liability or I will remove it within 28 days?'?

Mr BISHOP — That is the issue.

Mr GIRGIS — That is the issue.

Mr STONEY — From listening to what you are saying, I assume that councils have been caught up in exactly the same situation as private landowners with trees. They are caught up with the same planning conditions. So I was wondering how a private landowner would go if he had a dangerous tree on his drive? He would be caught up exactly the same as you.

Mr GIRGIS — They would have to go through the same process.
Mr COOK — Councils are able to issue planning permits for the removal of vegetation on private land but not on road reserves; we have to go through DSE.

Mr EREN — You have cut down 170 trees — —

Mr GIRGIS — We were actually able to cut down less than that.

Mr EREN — But you have planted 17 000 — —

Mr COOK — We have to replace every tree we take down with 100 more.

Mr EREN — So 17 000. Where did you plant — —

Mr GIRGIS — Where did I plant them? We had to go to the Department of Sustainability and Environment. They do not have to be in exactly the same spot; it can be in the area. By the way, it is 20 per cent trees and the rest is understorey, so we are not planting huge rivergums. We are planting a percentage and the rest is understorey. That is exactly my problem. I said, ‘Where am I going to put all these trees?’ So we talked to the local Landcare group, which defined a spot, and it is mainly on private land. I make sure that I plant them well and truly away from clear zones so I am not causing myself another problem in the future. But it is another issue.

Mr EREN — Who is burdened with the cost of removing those trees and planting the other trees?

Mr GIRGIS — We are.

Mr EREN — So the total cost is with the council?

Mr GIRGIS — The total cost for that project was one-seventh with the council and six-seventh timber industry roads. But if the roads are for me, I would bear all the costs.

Mr HARKNESS — As a separate issue, in the old Delatite shire there are a large number of motorcycle crashes, so I was just wondering if you could talk about that and what procedures you have put in place to deal with those issues.

Mr GIRGIS — I cannot talk off the top of my head about the statistics, but VicRoads has put a couple of submissions for motorcycle signs and things like that — —

Mr COOK — There was black spot funding for a particular spot on the Mansfield to Whitfield road for a guardrail and that sort of thing.

Mr GIRGIS — We spent $410 000 on the Mansfield to Whitfield road, which included guardrails on sections of road where there was an embankment. It is a 4.5 metre wide road with a 20 centimetre ditch, and we had to put guardrails there. Plus there was a sealing of the section and a number of issues to address that. Mansfield-Whitfield do it as well. Two hundred and eighty thousand dollars was spent on guardrails. We could not put guardrails. We had to put gabions on the side of the embankment to widen the road so I could put guardrail away from the road. We did that last year, if that is what you are talking about. I think that it was in the last two years or something.

Mr HARKNESS — Just to move away for a moment from engineering issues to behavioural things, what sort of preventive programs have you put in place to deal with things like fatigue, drink-driving, drugs, seatbelt wearing, hand-held phones, speed?

Mr GIRGIS — Council has not entered, to my knowledge, any program like that. I believe VicRoads through the accident thing is entering issues like that, and of course the police with all the dramatic pictures you see in the ads now. It has gone to the extreme to bring it to the people’s face. That is what is going to happen. Council did not see itself in the position of doing that or experienced enough to pursue it.

Mr HARKNESS — Some councils have employed a part-time or full-time road safety officer. Is that something you would like to pursue?
Mr GIRGIS — That is something that was put forward to Delatite Shire Council about four years ago, four and a half years ago, something like that. It is not being pursued today. That is something that we probably will pursue — I think it was a part-time officer. That is something that we probably will pursue in the future.

Mr COOK — The council does work in association with VicRoads, the police, the road safety committee and the service clubs to look at various issues. As far as fatigue goes, on long weekends and in public holiday periods the Lions Club or other clubs have a coffee break at various rest areas and that sort of thing, but being a small municipality it is very difficult to be able to encompass all areas as well as we would like.

Mr HARKNESS — I know down Warrnambool way three or four councils all contributed to hire a full-time person to share around.

Mr EREN — Has there been any incidence of accidents between livestock and vehicles?

Mr GIRGIS — I concentrated on fixed objects, but there are statistics somewhere in here relating to unfixed objects, which I assume are livestock or other things. I have not looked at that yet, but I am sure there may have been, although I do not think they are as significant. We do have a local laws officer to enforce matters when stock is on the road.

Mr EREN — Fences are checked?

Mr GIRGIS — Fences are checked; otherwise signs are put in place when stock is out on the road and so on. Council is very active in that area. We have employed another local laws officer this year especially to do some enforcement, and that is working well as well.

Mr STONEY — Certainly in some of the areas closer to the mountains there are a lot of accidents with kangaroos and deer.

Mr GIRGIS — That is right.

Mr STONEY — The local panel beaters I know at Mansfield almost make a living out of deer and kangaroos on the road to Buller.

Mr GIRGIS — I hit one on the Whitfield Road.

Mr LANGDON — On the issue of fatigue and the rest stops, you mentioned the Lions Club. The Chair and I went to a rest stop — I cannot remember what town it was.

The CHAIR — Eumerella.

Mr LANGDON — Thank you. The Lions Club was saying there that there are certain things that we as a community could do to help them staff that more often. Have you any suggestions as to how we could perhaps facilitate greater usage of the Lions Club to help those rest areas?

Mr GIRGIS — What was the suggestion that was put before you?

Mr LANGDON — They had to cart everything there, for example. They were giving the New South Wales example where they have enclosed areas where they can go to, lift up the roller door and everything is in there, for example.

The CHAIR — They are talking about making the stops more attractive — i.e., lights, toilets, shelter.

Mr LANGDON — And more attractive for them to be there as well.

Mr GIRGIS — It has not been put to us, but I am sure council would pursue anything they have in their power within their funds to facilitate and assist this issue. I cannot speak on behalf of my management, obviously, but if I was in their place I think to save one life a year is probably — —

Mr LANGDON — It was a very hypothetical question, I appreciate that.
The CHAIR — Any further questions? Thank you, Bassim and Norm, for a very concise presentation. That was excellent work.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Shepparton – 18 February 2004

Members

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

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

Staff

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

Witness

Mr R. Henderson, Manager of Infrastructure, Wodonga City Council.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the Wodonga City Council and Ray Henderson, who is the manager of infrastructure. Thank you for your time and effort in being here today. We look forward to what you have to say. The inquiries we are looking are the country road toll and crashes involving roadside objects. They are public hearings and we are taking transcript, so we will provide you with a copy of the transcript in due course.

You are also subject to parliamentary privilege, which means what you say cannot be used legally against you into the future. So again welcome, Ray. We do appreciate your input. Perhaps if you could start your submission by describing to us Wodonga City Council, geographically, the number of people et cetera.

Mr HENDERSON — Wodonga is one of the fastest growing regional areas in Victoria. At the moment we are probably growing at about 400 per year. Currently building activity is booming, and we are rapidly building out into what is basic countryside now, and it is a matter of getting strategic planning out ahead of the development.

My concern on the rural roads is that most of our feeder towns are coming from Yackandandah, Beechworth, Kiewa Valley and the Murray Valley Highway, and generally what happens is Albury-Wodonga is the growth area. That is where most of the employment is. Most of the traffic comes in in the morning and heads out at night. We often get a lot of school buses and school traffic doing exactly the same thing. With those access roads, that is where probably our highest risk is, because most of those roads are generally pretty narrow. The traffic volume is going up. I suppose 9 or 10 years ago we did road safety audits on most of those major roads, which were done by Vicroads, and given to us. We have always bid for money, but we never got a dollar in 10 years as most of those issues tend to be — —

Culverts are usually right on the edge of the bitumen. If you have an accident, they are rollover accidents for sure, and we have had quite a number of fatalities on that. A lot of the trees are close to the edge of the pavement. They are certainly well within the clear zone, but with this net gain policy from our community point of view there is a real issue there as well, because they are becoming far more environmentally aware, and I think the solution needs to be that in some cases you might need some guardrails, some other solution, so that you can retain as many of the trees as you can.

The CHAIR — When you talk about the net gain policy, you are talking about the policy of removing a tree and replacing it with multiple trees?

Mr HENDERSON — It is, but because you have also got the tree canopies DSE is very particular about trying to maintain that gap for those types of animals that need to fly across the road. Certainly at the moment Wodonga’s growth is going into what we call the Leneva Valley, which is south of Wodonga. At the moment we are currently planning for a city of 35 000 in that area, and we have just built a new arterial road which links Baraduda to Wodonga. We built that probably two years ago, and we have started subdivisions into that valley as we speak. In fact tomorrow we are all off to Sydney to get a few ideas as to what is happening in the development in Sydney. We have nearly all the landowners, all the designers in the region — I think about 23 of us — all heading to try to pick up a few ideas of how we should plan for future growth.

There are a few other issues I would like to raise. The biggest thing from our point of view is some commitment with ongoing funding for improvement works. What usually happens is we run a 10 or 15-year capital program for Wodonga and we have to change that. We review that all the time, but with Vicroads money, which is for the rural roads, we do not know from one year to the next. This year I did not get one dollar. I have been up there for over 30 years. I have never got one dollar for road improvement works. I have never had it as bad as it is now, and we are probably growing at about the fastest rate in 30 years. There is no correlation between what you need and what dollars you are getting for the works. We did have a win with the link road, which is part of a federal project, and that was obviously a key issue from our point of view because a lot of our black spots are on the link road between Albury and Wodonga, and that will alleviate a fair bit of the traffic flow and accidents that result from that.

I have a few other issues that need to be raised. A lot of the bridges on our roads are very narrow. We are getting very high traffic volumes and we are also getting quite a lot of cyclists. We are quite an active area for racing cyclists, and quite a lot of them shoot out onto these roads, and with their current road width it is unsafe. That is an issue that I have discussed with Vicroads as part of its north-east road strategy. There also needs to be a north–east cycle strategy, because most of the towns have their own principal cycle route plans. They have their own strategies, but there is nothing linking the region. Obviously there needs to be an ongoing program and links for the region so that you cater for them.
Another issue at the moment is that most of the shires now are going to rural garbage pick-up. Now that the garbage is picked up on the narrow roads there needs to be widening of most of the driveways so that when the garbage truck is picking up it is not sitting right on the traffic lane, because that in itself is a problem. We have changed our standard to accommodate that, and we can obviously pick up all the new developments as they need a planning permit. But there is obviously an issue with all the existing driveways, and that is something that needs to be addressed to improve safety. But how do you go back and address the ones that have the highest risk?

A similar issue is school bus pick-up on rural roads, particularly on the Beechworth main road or the Yackandandah main road. You need to get them well and truly off the traffic lane because the risk to students being picked up is just too high. We can address that in all the new suburbs we are getting in our rural areas. What we tend to do is provide one school bus pick-up within a certain walking range, but you can only do that when you have new developments; it is a bit hard to tackle the older developments.

The other issue which is also the risk is when you have new construction works, particularly reseal programs. We tend to get quite a number of accidents even with the signage out. People just get used to driving fast, and it is very hard to slow them down.

Mr HENDERSON — Yes. Every year you usually have a construction program and a reseal program on a rural roads. It has standard signage in accordance with the code, but people never really observes those signs as they should, and we tend to have a few accidents. We have had a number of fatalities purely because they drive too fast.

Mr LANGDON — This is in a roadworks area?

Mr HENDERSON — Yes, this is in a roadworks zone, the area where you are either working or you have just done a reseal, and that is usually green for a few weeks. Until that loose aggregate has got off the road and settled down, there is always a risk in those areas.

The other issue is the fire risk on rural roads, and obviously that is one thing with the current policy of no removal of timber. There is obviously a conflict and there has got to be a balance between maintaining the trees, maintaining a clear zone but still getting your habitats corridors — —

The CHAIR — On that issue, how effective have you found the process of removing trees that are identified as a road safety hazard? Is it a process that is relatively successful or do you become frustrated because you cannot get the trees removed?

Mr HENDERSON — What we are finding is that it is changing by the day. At the moment, particularly with the new growth in Wodonga, we have had a joint venture with DSE and done a study to identify all that vegetation that they want to retain.

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr HENDERSON — On most of our rural roads where we want to do some work we go through the planning approval process, which basically means that I do a site inspection with them. I normally engage a specialised consultant who is recognised in the area as having the assessment potential on flora and fauna. They do the report and we normally have plans to compensate for what we pull out. Now they even accept that we might do some weed control as a counterbalance to the necessary planting. So long as the environment has a win situation out of whatever tree removal projects we have.

The CHAIR — So it would be accurate to say that where a tree is recognised as a roadside hazard, through the process that tree will be removed, or are there exemptions?

Mr HENDERSON — In most cases it will. The only ones where it will not be is where you have a long length of trees, and that is obviously a very substantial and recognised part of the roadside management plan. Then that is when you need to apply another solution, whether that be guardrail or moving the road further away from them, you need another solution. So in those particular cases you need to consider what your options are. We have a particular one at the moment. If you go out of Wodonga on the south side, we have a whole corridor of trees. It is probably one of our highest conservation areas in the roadside management plan, but we have to duplicate the road.
We do not have to duplicate it for 20 years, but the trouble is that our residential development will be happening there next year, so we need to get the design and strategic plan far enough ahead so that you can at least get the reservation there. We try and get all our designs to preliminary design stage so that you at least have the levels. You are building a subdivision right beside it, so you need to have your levels, otherwise you never get the two to tie in. You need to have the arterial road designed in advance of your residential subdivision, otherwise you are always playing catch up. You have to get ahead of the development to get a proper solution.

I see a few problems in the case of emergencies. When you get an emergency, most councils have now got some company in Melbourne or wherever, and when you ring that number half the time they do not even know where you live. I live out in Indigo on the Beechworth Road. We had one just recently where there was a storm, and the centre of the table drain was operating and the water was sheet flowing down the road. There was already one accident and they had the ambulance there, but when I rang the emergency number they did not even know where the shire was. Luckily I knew the local scene and I knew who to call out. I also have emergency lights and things that I have at my own place, so I could shoot them up until their guys got there, but we are the same. You need to have, in my opinion, people who know exactly where your area is and respond very rapidly, particularly if you have an accident and a potential accident for other vehicles on the road. They do happen on a pretty regular basis. We had that storm Sunday night — the one that went through Moyhu. I do not know whether you read it in the paper. We had a big storm that went through our area. It bowled down that many trees and there were limbs all over the roads. It was gone in 10 minutes, but when it went through it was taking out trees this diameter.

The other thing I was going to raise is another issue that from my point of view seems to have gone on the backburner. Once upon a time we used to do three-way joint lighting schemes with Vicroads, TFU and councils. Since TFU has been privatised, we have not had one get up. A lot of the intersection work in the rural areas is where lighting at the intersection would improve the safety. We need to somehow or other address the funding of the lighting of those intersections. I also at the moment have a terrible issue even on my own jobs. I probably spent $1 million on lighting and power works last year, and I have had lighting orders in for probably six months waiting for lights to improve the safety on some of our roads. It is a monopoly. We cannot go anywhere else to get the work done, and we are not getting any response. I do not know what the solution is to it, but someone needs to look into that issue, because lighting is one of the key issues to the safety of your roads, particularly your intersections.

**The CHAIR** — One issue that we have come across is fatigue, and given where you are, Albury-Wodonga, with regard to the Melbourne–Sydney truck route, is fatigue an issue within your shire, especially for motorists travelling from Melbourne through to Sydney or truck drivers? Then we start to talk about issues such as the roadside stops, rest areas.

**Mr HENDERSON** — I do not think it is a problem on any of our local roads — when I say local roads, the commuter roads, because all our travelling distance is too short, but on the Melbourne to Sydney route and obviously the other routes, because what is happening at the moment is we have a lot of truck drivers reside in Albury-Wodonga. It is a bit like Shepparton. We get big numbers of truck drivers, particularly — I do not know if you are aware, but we are at the moment building a big transport node out in West Wodonga, which is where Woolworths are setting up their big $9 million distribution centre, and they are talking about 1000 truck movements a day, and we have also got a number of others interested as well. At this stage we are certainly planning, as part of that development, a major service centre which we would see would be an ideal stop for those trucks to come in. We would see truck servicing and that sort of facility being part of that complex, and being 2½ hours driving time from Melbourne, it is a good spot if people want to have a break. Obviously we are only in the early days of it, but certainly it is programmed for construction this financial year.

**Mr LANGDON** — There are also people coming back from Sydney. You might be 2½ hours from Melbourne, but going the other way you are 6 hours, 7 hours from Sydney, are you not?

**Mr HENDERSON** — Yes, we are. I know when we drive to Sydney there are a number of good stops on the way where you can pull in, and they often have those driver reviver places. I know myself in a car there are quite a number of those which seem to be, from my point of view, reasonably closely spaced. It is getting the people to actually take the break — that is the hardest thing — getting them to stop and have the break, because it is the ones that do not have the break that are often the ones that tend to have the accidents.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Ray. We appreciate your input. As I said, we are taking transcript and will provide you with a copy of that in due course.
Mr HENDERSON — Obviously the trees net gain policy is one of the big issues that is going to be a statewide thing. I think one of the biggest problems we have had is finding someone who has got higher up rank who actually can make a decision on what the actual state policy is, because we have not seen anything. It should be sitting in the planning scheme in my opinion, so that it is clear to everyone who operates out of it.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Ray.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Shepparton – 18 February 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
Deputy Chair: Mr E. G. Stoney

Staff

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

Witnesses

Mr E. Farrow, and
Mr P. McPhee, Goulburn Valley Road Safety Council.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the committee. You have probably heard the whole spiel before. You are subject to parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be held against you legally into the future. We can run this by handing it over to you at the moment, and we will ask some questions as we go through. We are on very tight time lines.

Mr FARROW — I will not take too much of your time. As well as being a community member of the Goulburn Valley Road Safety Council I am also the facilitator for our older road users programs. We travel around our region. So a lot of what I say comes from the people I talk to at these forums. One of the things that has come up three times at different meetings is culverts.

The CHAIR — When you talk about older road users, who are you talking to?

Mr FARROW — We travel to senior citizens, Probus groups and so on. We travel to anybody that wants us. But these are the main people that we talk to — Peter and myself, and normally a local policeman from the traffic management group, because they know all the new laws. Culverts came up, and I will pass these photographs around. I only have two copies. My facilities are not as good as some of the people who have been here this morning. Culverts on country roads are not only dangerous, but they are almost impossible to see.

The first photograph is just a black line around a white post and does not mean anything to a lot of people. If you pass this one around, it is only an enlarged photograph of the second one, which is a blue-green reflector disc on a post. If you are driving down a country road and see that, does it mean anything? Believe you me, there is a mark on there, and you can see where the hole is, a metre-deep hole there, and when you get a milk tanker or a wheat truck or even a school bus heading towards you, country people, as we all know, tend to pull over to give them more room, so they do not throw stones at you and all sorts of things. I know of two people, one who hit one of those holes, rolled a four-wheel-drive and has been in intensive care for 12 weeks while they put his brain back in his head, and another one who in the dusk swerved to miss a wombat and broke the front of the car off in another one. These are serious problems.

What I would like to see, and Vicroads is already doing this on some of its roads — there is a section just east of Echuca on the Murray Valley Highway where the pipes have been taken out probably 4 metres away from the road to give people the opportunity to pull off safely if they have to. Nos 1 to 4 of those photographs are on C-class roads. No. 5 is a bridge on a B-class road, and really it needs bridge markers to show people. It is the fact that you cannot see these things as you come to them that is the worry. If we had a sign up so people knew that was there, they could either stop before they got there or wait until they got past it before they pulled off.

The CHAIR — Have you or your committee raised these issues with either Vicroads or council, whichever is the responsible authority?

Mr FARROW — I will be taking this to our road safety council at our next meeting. Obviously I cannot raise it without the council, and this will come up at our next meeting and hopefully we can push it forward.

Mr BISHOP — Have you got any history of accidents occurring in relation to these culverts? I see them all the time when I drive around, but is there much history?

Mr FARROW — No, there is not, because nobody will take the blame for it anyway, but I do know of one where a car hit a tree, but they hit a culvert first and lost control of their car at a crossroad and then hit a tree.

So these things do happen, and as you drive around the countryside you can see why.

The CHAIR — But the potential is there.

Mr FARROW — You cannot see them. We talk about trees and power poles; we can see those and we can dodge them, but these are the things that you cannot see. As I said in my notes, to make them safe, like Vicroads is doing with some of its new work, just lengthen the pipes. Let us look at this honestly, there are thousands of these in country areas.

The CHAIR — Yes, that is right.

Mr FARROW — I took those photographs within 10 kilometres. So that is only a very short distance, and yet there have been four or five deaths.
Mr STONEY — Eric, how does the process work when someone on the council identifies a dangerous
tree or a dangerous culvert or something? You have a debate in council and then if it is agreed you take that
forward. Is that how it works?

Mr FARROW — That is certainly how it works. As a community member of the council I get lots of
things directly from the community to bring up at a council level, which I do. Representatives from VicRoads are
always there, and so they are part of the discussion, and then it goes forward.

Mr STONEY — Do you send it forward with an official letter to council and VicRoads?

Mr FARROW — It would normally go to VicRoads, and Peter would send a covering letter.

Mr STONEY — Have you had much success?

Mr FARROW — Very much so. The success we have had is very pleasing. We have had some speeding
things changed because people kept telling us it was too fast. We deal with motorised wheelchairs as well, and
people are saying that they have not got time to get across the road because cars are going too fast. We went
through the right channels and that was changed, and that was good. So yes, we do have success.

Mr BISHOP — I thought you said 4 metres, but here you are saying 1 metre.

Mr FARROW — Yes, this would give people another metre. These are right on the road edge, but I am
saying that VicRoads has obviously seen the danger, and some of theirs now are 4 metres.

Mr STONEY — Did I understand that you said earlier that you are involved with or represent older
drivers?.

Mr FARROW — I am very much involved. We go around and talk to them.

Mr STONEY — Did you see this committee’s report on older drivers?

Mr FARROW — Yes, I did. I have a copy, and I put a submission to that too.

Mr STONEY — Right. I thought we could send you one.

Mr FARROW — I have got one.

The CHAIR — What did you think of the report?

Mr FARROW — Very good, I just wish that all your wishes could come true.

The CHAIR — So do we.

Mr BISHOP — We will tell you in a couple of months.

The CHAIR — That report is being given to the government, and it will make a response in this sitting of
Parliament, which begins next week. We will be interested in its response as well.

Mr FARROW — So will we. Thank you for allowing me to come and waste some more of your time.

Mr BISHOP — It is our pleasure.

The CHAIR — Thank you Eric. Again, thank you Peter.

Mr McPhee — Eric is a longstanding and hard worker on the road safety council. He is a true road
safety person. He puts a lot of time into it, and we are very fortunate to have him and pleased to get him today. He
has a very important issue.

Mr FARROW — Is that an apology?

The CHAIR — Thank you Eric.
Mr FARROW — Thanks, Ian. I got involved with this because I have been a volunteer fireman here for 35 years, and in the early days we had to go to all the accidents to assist the ambulance people to drag bodies out of cars and things like that. Every one we can save is a good step. Thanks very much.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Mr BISHOP — Stick up for the older drivers, Eric.

Mr FARROW — I will look after them. I am one of them!

Mr BISHOP — I am too.

The CHAIR — Thanks Peter and Eric.

Committee adjourned.