



Brunswick Residents Network

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brunswickresidents.wordpress.com

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The Secretary
Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Emailed to: roadtollinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

Brunswick Residents Network submission: Inquiry into the increase in Victoria's Road Toll

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the increase in Victoria's road toll.

Brunswick Residents Network is a residents group that formed in 2010 in the City of Moreland. It engages with and links local community and businesses through public meetings and social and traditional media. At the core of our network are residents and community groups in Brunswick. We organise community initiatives around planning, transport, open space, building, and local government and share information through a monthly newsletter, public meetings and community events. We have been active around issues of traffic planning and management, and the promotion of liveable streets and active transport.

Through major surveys of residents over the last decade, we have documented concerns about increasing traffic dangers in local streets, and actively engaged with Moreland Council's traffic strategy development. See <https://brunswickresidents.wordpress.com/traffic/>.

The scope and context of this inquiry

This Inquiry has been sparked by the increasing road toll. We submit that it should consider both fatalities and serious accidents and injuries, as both categories have broad-ranging effects on families, the broader community, and our economy.

We note that this increase in the overall road toll comes despite a decrease in deaths of car drivers and passengers. A high percentage of fatal and serious accidents are vulnerable road-users, including pedestrians, cyclists and motor-cyclists.

According to data from the Traffic Accident Commission (TAC) and Department of Transport (DOT), more than 400 pedestrians lost their lives on Victorian roads in the last 10 years. This particularly affects the elderly — one third of pedestrians who lost their lives are aged 70 years or over. According to this TAC data, pedestrians make up 55 per cent of road deaths in Moreland. Per capita, our municipality is also the 4th worst in Melbourne for serious injuries. Our rate of pedestrian trauma is nearly twice the rate of the whole state.

(See TAC: <http://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/statistics/online-crash-database/search-crash-data> and DOT: <https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/safety-and-road-rules/safety-statistics/crash-statistics>)

We submit that the Inquiry should not be limited to traffic accident statistics, but should also consider other transport-related causes of death and serious injury such as:

- Violent attacks on pedestrians (in particular women), and other transport users
- Other pedestrian injuries (e.g. falls) in the road or public transport environment; and collection of data on these injuries
- The contribution of different forms of transport to death and morbidity related to air pollution
- The health risks of climate change and how these are increased/decreased through transport planning.

As part of the broad terms of reference for the Inquiry, we will focus in this submission on some bigger picture issues.

1. Background: Changes to our transport environment

In our municipality, there are more cars on the road and this is affecting resident safety.

The residential streets of Brunswick were constructed in an era when most people worked, schooled and shopped locally. Previously most residents travelled by foot and public transport. It's only in recent years that streets have been full of traffic and parked cars. This increase in traffic comes despite our suburb having a relatively low level of cars per household (currently 21.4 per cent of households have no cars, and this proportion is increasing).

After a period of population decline, the population of Brunswick is increasing rapidly in response to planning law changes that encourage housing densification. The overall population of Melbourne is also increasing.

State Government public transport planning has not succeeded in anticipating or keeping up with increased demand. Public Transport services are over-crowded at peak hour and beyond, along the Upfield rail line and major tram routes through the suburb (Nicholson Street Route 96, Lygon Streets Routes 1 and 6, Sydney Road Route 19 and West Brunswick Route 58).

Victoria's planning system has allowed developers to bring thousands of new residents into our suburb without paying a reasonable share of costs for additional traffic management, leaving behind them pot-holed and patched local roads (for example, a 2014 VCAT decision required major developer Banco to provide just one traffic hump outside their enormous East Brunswick Village development, which includes levels of underground car-parking to service a supermarket, shops and hundreds of apartments).

Local and state government road hierarchies define which are major roads, and which roads are for local traffic. However these plans are disregarded and disrupted by new technologies like Google Maps. These apps ignore local/state government road hierarchies, and direct traffic along the fastest route as determined by their algorithms. This channels "rat-running" through quiet residential streets rather than larger arterials, increasing hazards for pedestrians and cyclists.

As a consequence, previously safe and pleasant routes for walking, cycling and socialising have become unsafe, and unpleasant. “Liveable” streets become less liveable. Cycling groups lobby to ride on footpaths because roads are unsafe, potentially increasing hazards for pedestrians.

The major focus and funding for new infrastructure has been the creation of new roads. We acknowledge that funding is also being provided for new public transport infrastructure, but there is a long lag-time to meet rising demand. In comparison, the opportunity to encourage Melbournians to use active forms of transport (walking and cycling) has not been taken up in any major way by the State Government: little major infrastructure funding has been allocated to infrastructure for bicycle or walking for commuting or daily transport needs.

2. What needs to change?

Increasingly, vulnerable road users are the victims in the road toll. We advocate for an rebalancing of the government’s focus and funding away from road transport, towards pedestrian and cyclist safety. Further, a focus on mode shift to active and public transport will reduce vehicle traffic and its associated hazards. As noted above, as well as the direct road toll, these hazards include carbon emissions and air pollution. Infrastructure for walking and cycling is also less costly than for major roads.

In relations to priorities for pedestrians, we note and support the detailed and well-documented proposals submitted to this inquiry by the community organisation Walk On Moreland.

3. Specific proposals:

We call on the State Government to:

1. Provide major infrastructure funding for (separated) bicycle lanes and footpaths.
 - Major bicycle infrastructure is needed to create a network of major routes. Linking off-road and low-traffic roads and footpaths can also be important. For example Darebin and Moreland councils recently funded a new bike/pedestrian bridge over the Merri Creek as a safe route joining Northcote and Brunswick north of Arthurlon Road. This bridge will soon enable children to walk/ride safely to their nearest school (East Brunswick Primary). State funding should be readily available to local government for projects like these.
 - State funding is also needed for systematic upgrading of footpaths, such as at-level crossings at intersections.
2. Cut traffic management costs by devolving control of local roads to Local Government. Moreland Council inform us that a major cost in traffic management involves paying staff for extensive amounts of time spent negotiating permissions with DOT. This is one area where “Red Tape Removal” is in fact justified. There is an urgent need for increased and more effective traffic management measures to return local streets to local traffic, and shield them from the current flood of rat-running traffic. Stronger barriers to rat-running are needed (e.g. road closures on key minor streets that are used by rat-runners to access local streets). Zebra crossings are needed to calm traffic and allow safe crossings.
3. The State Government should make changes to the Victorian Planning Scheme to require developers to do precinct-wide or “horizon” traffic plans for major development projects. Current laws require traffic plans for the new building/development alone, without looking at any traffic impacts from neighbouring projects. This is a significant problem in Brunswick East, where there are currently a dozen major development projects in a square kilometre, but each individual traffic plan does not take any account of the combined increase in vehicle movement from neighbouring projects.

4. There is a need for a change of culture in the DOT, to speed up the transition to a new transport policy that prioritises safety and community. The DOT should review and update its guidelines, in view of the traffic management challenges faced in inner urban areas. Innovative strategies like “Shared Zones’ should be permitted (current DOT guidelines apparently only allow these on roads with less than 1000 vehicle movements/day).
5. Recognise the well-documented role of speed in serious accidents. Permit Councils to determine and implement lower speed limits (e.g. 30 km/h in minor local streets, and possibly lower near schools and in carparks) without requiring costly staff time gaining permission from DOT.
6. Investigate evidence that SUV vehicles, while safer for passengers, are more likely to kill or seriously injure vulnerable road users in any collision.
7. Ensure that planning and building laws require developers to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists over cars in building design; pay for traffic management made necessary by the additional traffic flow they bring to the area; and pay for full repair of damage to roads and footpaths caused during construction.
8. Utilise new technologies for enforcement of traffic rules (e.g. red-light-running, grid-locking, and passing trams while passengers are boarding/descending). These measures should be cost-neutral if fines are paid.
9. Increase frequency of public transport services. Although Brunswick is better served than most areas, we need:
 - More capacity at peak hour
 - Higher frequency of trains on Upfield line (currently 20 minutes) and duplication of the Upfield line north of Gowrie station.
 - Higher frequency and reliability of east-west buses (eg Dawson Street bus does not run on weekend evenings)
10. With the federal government, investigate the disruption caused by Google Maps and other traffic navigation apps, and the effectiveness of legislation and other measures being introduced in other countries, to prevent these apps directing traffic through local streets.

Brunswick Residents Network would be happy to discuss any of these issues during public hearings and can provide further data to support our submission as required.

For further information, contact:

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