

# **PROOF VERSION ONLY**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

### **Inquiry into the Increase in Victoria's Road Toll**

Melbourne—Monday, 10 August 2020

*(via videoconference)*

#### **MEMBERS**

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Mr Mark Gepp

#### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Dr Matthew Bach

Mr David Limbrick

Ms Melina Bath

Mr Andy Meddick

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr David Davis

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

## WITNESS

Mr Robert Morgan.

**The CHAIR:** I welcome you to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Increase in Victoria's Road Toll. I welcome any members of the public that are watching via our live broadcast. My name is Enver Erdogan, and I am Chair of the committee. I would like to introduce Mr Bernie Finn, our Deputy Chair, and also fellow members of the committee Mr Mark Gepp, Mr Tim Quilty, Mr Rod Barton and Mrs Bev McArthur, who are also online.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. However, any comment repeated outside the hearing may not be protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

We welcome any opening comments but ask that they please be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes. I am sure that may be a challenge with all the slides, but that is to ensure that we have more time for discussion and questions and answers. Can I please remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise any interference. If you have any technical difficulties at any stage, please disconnect and contact the committee staff member whose contacts have been provided to you already. Could you please begin by stating your name for the benefit of our Hansard team and then start your presentation. Thank you.

**Mr MORGAN:** Good morning. I am Robert Morgan, road safety and traffic engineer. I will just share my screen to make my presentation. It is only the first 11 slides.

### Visual presentation.

**Mr MORGAN:** The main points of my presentation: firstly that, number one, fatalities are a small number and so they are likely to fluctuate. Serious injuries are bigger numbers, and there has been a worrying increase in those.

Number two: we should not focus on just fatal and serious injury—FSI—crashes. We will get bigger results in reductions in fatal and serious injury crashes if we look at all crashes.

Number three: Vision Zero and the Safe System are flawed. They ignore human factors knowledge. They focus on fatal and serious injury crashes, which are only 1 per cent of all crashes. The aim of trying to achieve zero is absurd, which I will get to in the next point. The system offers simplistic solutions when detailed analysis is needed. It relies on what has become dogma rather than science or knowledge or analysis.

Number four: 'zero deaths and serious injuries'—it is really not possible. It has been described as an infantile fantasy. And I ask, what next? Zero suffering? It ignores mobility, the cost of achieving zero, and other community objectives. And it would be better—that is, more honest—if we simply seek to reduce trauma.

Number five: it is important to understand the difference between focusing on high-risk behaviours, which has been the traditional approach, and seeking to shift behaviours of the low-risk majority, and while I support the notion that road safety is a public health issue, there is this approach called the public health approach and this is trying to shift behaviours in the low-risk majority.

Number six: regarding speed, the speed limit does not equal the travel speed, so we need to be careful about that. There is no automatic crash benefit in reducing the speed limit. Sometimes there is a benefit and sometimes there is not. And 85th percentile speeds have been demonised, though this measure is still the best starting point in determining speed limits.

Number seven: transparency and honesty are essential. There is dishonesty in *Towards Zero*—for example, study results being kept secret or not trusting the public to know about enforcement tolerances.

Eight: I have provided a suggested alternative approach which is at odds with the Safe System. The elements of that that I highlight here are that there should be no absolutes. There is no bottomless pit of money for road safety. Zero is not possible. Most road users are reasonable. We need to treat them so. We need to reduce crash causes as well as crash consequences. We should encourage responsibility in the key areas I have highlighted, and actions need to be evidence-based—that is, evidence of effectiveness.

Effective analysis needs good data—this is number 9—but unfortunately we cannot get access to the details that do exist and also the data is poor. It does not include non-casualty crashes, so the results are that projects can be ineffective and money is wasted.

Item 10: the loss of skills and experience. The value of technical experience within government is not appreciated—that is, managerialism is what appears to rule. And there are simply not enough technical professionals employed in government. It is worth remembering that the road toll of 1970 was conquered by the scientific approach—that is, the development and application of knowledge and skills within government.

Now, just to illustrate the issue of skills and experience, consider the past 60 or 70 years. If we start at the bottom left here, in the 1950s and 60s we had the prescientific notions of road safety: ‘If only everybody was careful, the road toll would go down’. Slowly there were gains in technical understanding through trials, tests and studies, and so finally governments accepted their role in applying the knowledge, spending money and doing that effectively. This included stopping blaming the driver. And so by the 1980s the road toll was brought out under control, and there are a few examples at the bottom right, there, of how that was done.

And now slide 7: unfortunately by the late 1980s neoliberalism was taking hold. We saw in 1989 the amalgamation of the RTA and the RCA into VicRoads, and unfortunately, in cultural terms, the road builders took over the road safety people and the traffic people. We then saw, with that amalgamation, downsizing, and that has happened again and again, which has led to loss of skills and a knowledge vacuum. And it is within that context that the Safe System was invented. And so we have seen, from that, dogma replacing detailed analysis. So we are now back to blaming the driver and a return to prescientific notions of road safety. Whereas, before, it was, ‘If only everybody would be more careful, we could reduce the road toll’, now it is, ‘If only everybody slowed down, we could reduce the road toll’. Now, there are some examples in later slides, which the committee would be aware of, and I would be happy to discuss those.

Let me just finish with one other example here, which is Greythorn Road. We have recently seen in the paper that Boroondara has been given \$300 000 to install a 40-kilometre shopping centre speed limit on Doncaster Road. And from the council I have been advised there have been 16 casualties crashes in five years, two pedestrians and five cyclists. No detailed crash analysis has been done, as far as I can establish. So speed limit signing only costs around \$50 000; what is the rest being spent on? We see that in fact it is a whole lot of paving treatments et cetera, but the most critical one, from the safety point of view, is that the footpath is going to be widened by 2 metres. That means that the buffer behind the angled parking is going to be removed. So I just make the points as examples here. The devil is in the detail. There is no guarantee that a lower limit will mean a lower speed and more safety, because if you remove the buffer from the angled parking, that means you are probably likely to get increased cycling and other reversing crashes. VicRoads has guidelines on this, and so I wonder how a scheme like this gets developed. I think it is an example of the loss of skills leading to the reliance on the dogma of slow speeds. Also the Safe System is not the only dogma now; this is an example of how movement and place is dictating what is happening.

So in the final one here I just say, from my submission, road safety actions need to be evidence based. There need to be skills and experience within government and good data. They need to be effective, and they need to be cognisant of other community objectives and be cost effective. And a road safety strategy based on these three elements is what Victoria needs. I will now turn my speakers on and hope they work.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Robert, for that presentation. I might pass over to Mr Quilty for the first question because I am cognisant he has not had a go first yet today.

**Mr QUILTY:** Thank you very much for that. When I was reading some other submissions I was getting cranky about them, but when I read yours I got excited because someone is saying exactly what I think. So I really do not have anything to pick apart here because I support pretty much everything you said. I really am amazed to find someone in road safety who is actually putting forward sensible ideas like this. I guess my one

question: are their sections of, for example, the Hume Highway—good highways—where you think the speed limits could be raised above 110?

**Mr MORGAN:** So far as speed limits are concerned, there may be sections there where you have a high standard of road design—and now we have got the barriers along the sides—and this may well be the case.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Morgan, we are still getting the delay. You might need to put your speakers off or turn them down just to assist the committee. I might pass over to Mr Barton, if he has a question, or to Mr Finn. Who would like to go next?

**Mr FINN:** I am happy to go next today, Mr Chairman. I have only got a couple of very, very brief questions. Firstly, Robert, thank you for your contribution today. I am not sure whether you can hear me, but thank you nonetheless. Now, would it be safe to say, given everything that you have put forward here today, that the behaviour of the minority has caused the majority of crashes?

**Mr MORGAN:** I think that the minority is where a lot of the problem is—

**The CHAIR:** Are you watching from another computer? Do you have another computer?

**Mr MORGAN:** No, I am watching from the computer that I tested it on last week. I am sorry. I appreciate for the committee this is going to be impossible, so I do not know what the solution is.

**The CHAIR:** I think going forward it might just be easier—and we have done this before with other speakers—if we ask the committee members to put their questions in writing. What if we forward those to you, Robert, and then in due course you can respond in a prompt fashion. That might be easier.

**Mr MORGAN:** Yes, I have just heard that question, Mr Chair, and I would be very pleased to answer the questions in writing.

**The CHAIR:** If everyone on the committee is happy with that, how about we do that? I just want an indication from committee members if you are fine with just putting any questions you may have to Robert in writing. I have got a couple, and I will get the secretary to compile the questions and send them in one email to you, Robert, in due course. Thank you, Robert. Thank you very much for your presentation. The slides were very informative.

**Witness withdrew.**