

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne—Tuesday, 8 September 2020

*(via videoconference/teleconference)*

#### **MEMBERS**

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Mark Gepp

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Lee Tarlamis

#### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr David Davis

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips



**WITNESSES**

Mr John Baker, Chief Executive Officer,

Mr Tom Haines-Sutherland, Team Leader, Traffic and Transport, and

Mr Davey Smith, Executive Manager, Infrastructure Strategy and Climate Change, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open 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 the Chair of the committee. I would also like to acknowledge my fellow members of the committee who are present here today: Mr Mark Gepp, Mrs Beverley McArthur, Mr Rod Barton, Mr Lee Tarlamis and Mr Andy Meddick.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and is 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 made 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 your opening comments but ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to allow plenty of time for discussion. If you have any technical difficulties, please disconnect and contact committee staff using the contacts you were provided. Can I please remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise any interference. Could you please begin by stating your name for the benefit of the Hansard team and then start your presentation. Over to you, John.

**Visual presentation.**

**Mr BAKER:** Thank you very much, Enver, and thank you for the opportunity to present this submission. Road trauma is huge on the Mornington Peninsula, and alarmingly it appears to be on the rise over the last few years. Last year Mornington Peninsula shire experienced more road deaths than any other Victorian municipality for the second time in a decade. Over the past years there have been 75 people lost on the Mornington Peninsula and 1500 people seriously injured on the peninsula's roads. As the level of government that is closest to the community we are keenly aware of the tremendous pain, grief and suffering that those road traumas bring to our community, because we feel it too. We have staff that are impacted, and we deal with the community on a day-to-day basis when they are impacted by these road accidents.

We have a very good handle on what is going on within the Mornington Peninsula and I think what needs to be done to actually fix it, and that is something that we want to talk about a little bit today. But for our plan to work there need to be some significant structural and systemic obstacles removed for us to be able to have a real impact. So what we are proposing today is a step change in the approach that will require a willingness to move away from business as usual and a willingness, really, to explore new ways of working. If it succeeds, we believe that the impact on our community will be incalculable. We believe, as far as what the solution is, that there is nothing wrong with the Victorian government's approach, and indeed the shire's approach. It is the delivery that is the problem. We know what the world's best practice is as far as road safety is concerned, because we and the state are already committed to it. It is the Safe System approach. It has been written into the state's road safety strategies for many years, and we have been trying to implement it on the Mornington Peninsula, but it is fair to say that we have been hampered by a range of what we would describe as institutional roadblocks.

My colleague Tom will be talking a little bit more about those later, but in short it boils down to two things: funding and the authority to fully implement the Safe System as it was intended. This includes education, speed management and a new approach to infrastructure spending. It is clear to us that what is needed is a delivery approach that is coordinated, that is innovative, that is empowered and that is locally based, and with the

assistance from our road safety partners we believe the Mornington Peninsula Shire is best placed to demonstrate how this can be done, because we have with other innovative approaches to road safety.

So why is this important? I cannot talk about this without talking about the fact that I ran a not-for-profit that helped navigate the NDIS and I came across many people with serious injuries—acquired brain injuries—who were massively impacted; people who have had this impact, like this local man, Sam Howe, for example. Eleven years ago he was a university student. In his words he went out for a night of fun and came back home six months later. A road accident left him with fractured eye sockets, it left him with a broken pelvis in the lower back, with damaged lungs. His mum said she only ever got part of him back from hospital. Sam cannot remember much about the person he was and relies on others to tell him about that. He did not die, so he never showed up in the headline road toll figures, but his injuries were so serious that his life will never be the same again. So Sam and his family are the hidden victims of road traumas. It is not about that headline figure of 75 road deaths, tragic as they are; it is the 1500 people and the extended families associated with those accidents. We believe that we can do something about it if we work constructively with you.

I am now going to hand over to our Team Leader, Traffic and Transport, Tom Haines-Sutherland, to talk you through what our proposal is to do something about this. It explains why the current approach is not working, and more importantly it offers a solution to the local problem and to demonstrate how Victoria can meet its targets for road trauma. It is an opportunity to show that Victoria is taking meaningful, ambitious and innovative steps to end the appalling waste of life on our roads. Over to you, Tom.

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you, John. As John mentioned, in the past decade alone 75 people were killed and over 1500 seriously injured on the Mornington Peninsula's roads. Among Victoria's 79 municipalities we experienced the highest number of deaths in 2010 and again in 2019. You can see from the graph on the slide that there is no longer a clear downward trend in the number of lives lost on our roads. As occurred with the introduction of seat belts, speed cameras and booze buses, if this is to change, strong leadership and a new approach is required.

For more than a decade the Mornington Peninsula Shire has sought to be a courageous road safety leader, not only among municipalities but also in relationships with state agencies and our local community. In 2016 we became Victoria's first *Towards Zero* municipality and committed to the goal of zero deaths and serious injuries on roads within the shire. In 2019 we successfully implemented a trial of 80 kilometres an hour speed limits on our high-risk rural roads, called the Safer Speeds trial. We are currently working with a cross-organisational group of road safety professionals, led by Road Safety Victoria, to evaluate the trial. Through the Black Spot and Roads to Recovery programs we will be constructing four cost-effective compact roundabouts in different road environments over the next two years, which is a first in Australia. These projects demonstrate that the Mornington Peninsula shire is not only a leader in road safety, it has the capability and drive to deliver challenging projects for the benefit of the community across the state and the nation.

The Safe System approach is widely considered to be the best-practice approach in road safety. It has been successfully implemented with outstanding results in the Netherlands and Sweden, who are now consistently world leaders in road safety. The Safe System approach involves the coordinated reduction of both the likelihood and the severity of crashes through four pillars—safer roads, safer vehicles, safer people and safer speeds. The Safe System has been the basis of Victoria's road safety strategy since 2016; however, it is yet to be properly implemented. Over this period there have been huge sums of money invested by state and federal governments into upgrading the road network. This funding has been spent largely on high-cost treatments such as road safety barriers and large roundabouts, which now cost up to \$10 million each on arterial roads. Implementing lower cost innovative treatments and the safer speeds pillar has been largely overlooked.

The ongoing impact of this approach is that the number of locations treated is lower than it should be, and the approach of focusing on crash history rather than the risk of future crashes has been perpetuated. Roads where people have not yet suffered severe trauma in high enough numbers remain untreated, often with speed limits that are only appropriate on roads of a much higher standard. Unfortunately the Safe System approach remains theoretical in Victoria, having not yet been implemented and tested.

Mornington Peninsula shire has recently developed a new *Towards Zero* road safety strategy. Its development involved detailed analysis of the environments and circumstances of crashes resulting in severe trauma. What we have learned from this data analysis is that the crashes that cause severe trauma on the peninsula are both

predictable and preventable. While the knowledge that the loss of life and impact on so many livelihoods could have been prevented is confronting, this predictability is inherently a good thing. It means that with the Safe System approach and a commitment to eliminate systemic risk thousands of people in the future need not be killed or seriously injured on our roads.

The Mornington Peninsula shire's submission to this inquiry provides a way forward for both the shire and the state to proactively address this public health crisis and to meet their targets for road trauma reduction. To do this, two key elements are required. The first is an empowered and strategic leadership team comprised of passionate individual representatives from the Mornington Peninsula shire, the Department of Transport, the department of justice, Victoria Police and the TAC. The role of this team would be to implement all four pillars of the Safe System. A key responsibility would be the prioritisation of infrastructure projects according to the data analysis from the shire's *Towards Zero* road safety strategy. The team would require the authority to approve speed limit changes aligned to the Safe System and to implement innovative road safety treatments. Innovative treatments would then be evaluated to inform the rollout of the most effective treatments statewide.

While cost-effective innovative treatments would be prioritised, funding is required to demonstrate the Safe System. It is estimated that \$150 million would be required over 10 years to significantly reduce the risk of severe trauma on the Mornington Peninsula. This funding would initially be used to construct compact roundabouts at up to 30 rural intersections and 50 residential intersections; implement 40 kilometre-an-hour zones and traffic calming in areas of high pedestrian activity; manage speed limits in line with the Safe System principles across the peninsula's road network; develop and prioritise Safe System-aligned packages of works, enforcement and education initiatives based on data analysis and risk assessment; and evaluate treatments to determine which are most effective for rollout across Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Tom. I just hope not to cut you off but if you could just wrap up so we can allow some of the members who have questions on their minds—I am getting requests for questions. So if we can get into discussion, because I am sure most of us or all of us would have actually read the submission.

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Okay. I will wind up. So for less than the cost of a single level crossing removal the benefits include proof that the state-endorsed Safe System approach is an effective way to stem the flow of severe road trauma in Victoria; better value for investment through lower cost, innovative road safety treatments; reliable data on community perception of innovative treatments and lower speed limits; economic benefits of safe and vibrant commercial and residential areas with much lower TAC payouts; achieving the next fundamental long-term shift in approach to road trauma reduction; and finally, to save lives and livelihoods, which is why we are all here. This investment would show true leadership in road safety and would pave the way towards zero deaths and serious injuries on Victoria's roads.

Thank you for the opportunity to present, and John and I are willing to answer any questions you may have on our submission.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much to the team from Mornington Peninsula shire for that informative submission and presentation. I might pass over to Mrs Beverley McArthur for the first question.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for your presentation. Isn't *Towards Zero* just a feel-good slogan, a bit like 'towards zero COVID cases', which we are learning about at the moment? Do you think that individuals should be taking more responsibility for their actions in the way they drive? After all, you quoted 75 deaths over a decade. How many of those were people that may have been drug or alcohol affected, using their mobile phone—international drivers, for example? Can you just give us a bit more information on the data? We all agree that we need much better data. Every single, I think, witness has said the data is hopeless. We definitely need better data. But would you like to comment on my thoughts?

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you, Mrs McArthur. So to answer your question about the data to begin with, according to the TAC, statewide approximately 70 per cent of people who are killed or seriously injured on our roads are doing absolutely the right thing. They are driving unaffected and they are driving within the speed limits and in an appropriate manner. So while there are sort of limits to what can be done to protect people who drive outside of the recommended way, affected or outside the speed limits, we are largely talking about people who are just going about their daily activities. They are driving their kids to school or, you know, driving to sports activities or something like that. Inherently our road system is dangerous, so when they

do make mistakes—and mistakes do happen—or if something happens completely outside of their control, they are not likely to be killed or seriously injured on the roads.

That is what *Towards Zero* and Safe System is about. It is about accepting that there is a limit to what the human body can withstand and accepting that people will make mistakes and creating a road system where people who are doing the right thing are not likely to be killed or seriously injured. So I think you would probably hear the same thing from many people who have presented to you, that the *Towards Zero* approach is really the only approach. We have to aim towards zero, because it is not acceptable for people to be killed and seriously injured just going about their daily lives, especially in the numbers that we are seeing at the moment.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Chair, a follow-up question. I think you are a supporter of wire rope barriers. Have you got a comment on the VAGO report?

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Is there something specifically in the VAGO report that you are referring to?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Well, it is quite damning about the installation of wire rope barriers. If you are a supporter of wire rope barriers as a road trauma prevention measure, then perhaps you would want to know what the Auditor-General thought of it all.

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Wire rope barriers are a high-cost treatment. They are necessary and appropriate on some roads, but I would argue that probably on the higher speed roads, where we are intending to keep really high speed limits like 100 kilometres an hour, where if you crash at 100 kilometres an hour in pretty much any situation you are highly likely to be seriously injured or killed—in those sorts of situations—a wire rope barrier is very effective at reducing the impact of a crash that has already occurred. It is not a particularly good preventative measure because you have to hit the barrier for it to have any effect. However, we are talking about the Safe System, including treatments on roads and roadsides as well as the other killers, addressing other areas of it, so wire rope barriers are, on high-speed roads, necessary if we are looking at maintaining higher speed limits, which I think is appropriate on freeways and other roads of that type.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I might pass over to Mr Gepp, Mr Barton and then Mr Meddick, in that order. Mr Gepp.

**Mr GEPP:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, John, Tom and Davey for the presentation this morning. I am interested to explore the notion of the impact of adjusting speed limits as a key measure to reduce the road toll. We have had previous witnesses come before the committee who have talked about the impact of a reduced speed limit on day-to-day life for people, particularly in rural and regional Victoria, where the distances from A to B are quite often much more significant than what they are in metropolitan and peri-urban environments. Can you just talk me through a little bit about that concept and any evidence-based data that you have relied upon which demonstrates the adjustments to speed and how that will significantly reduce that road toll?

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you, Mr Gepp. As I mentioned in the presentation, we recently implemented a trial of 80-kilometre-an-hour speed limits on our previously 100-kilometre-an-hour and 90-kilometre-an-hour sealed rural roads. We have done some work on this in the past and have demonstrated vast community acceptance and support for this sort of thing. The Mornington Peninsula Shire is quite an interesting and appropriate place to trial this sort of thing because we do have that mix—we are an interface council but have rural areas as well as more urban-type areas. It is a great place to trial that sort of thing.

But in terms of more rural areas where distances are larger, I think road safety professionals almost across the board would say that the Safe System approach takes that sort of thing into account—takes travel time into account—where it says that on longer areas and higher standard roads that are really critical for freight and for the economy we should be using things like wire rope barriers to treat those long sections of roads so that we can maintain speed limits at 100 kilometres an hour and for that still to align with that risk minimisation approach. Then on roads that are of lower standard, that carry much less traffic and much less freight and are much less crucial for the economy, we can do things like lowering speed limits. In fact it is really the only practical solution because on all of these roads it would take—I believe the RACV stated—1000 years at the current level of infrastructure spending on road safety to address all of those lower-standard roads. So it is absolutely crucial to also look at the safer speeds pillar as part of the holistic Safe System approach in order to minimise risk across the network.

**Mr GEPP:** Chair, if I could just have a very quick follow-up question if that is okay. Tom, in terms of the trial that you went through I am particularly interested in the rural aspects of the shire where you were talking about more unsealed roads, more remote roads that do not have the high traffic. It occurs to me that if these roads are not well used, how would we know whether or not people are observing the speed limit—I guess going back to Mrs McArthur's question about driver behaviour. Did you establish anything through your trial around those issues?

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you, Mr Gepp. Yes, absolutely. We did baseline data collection—speed data. We actually collected data on every single one of the 35ish roads that we implemented this trial on. We collected data which suggested that essentially people were driving at or very close to the speed limit—in some cases slightly over, in some cases under and in some cases, actually, where the standard of the roads was lower, quite significantly under what the speed limit was. Our initial data collection is indicating that people are slowing down with the reduced speed limits on those roads, which is great. However, we are still in the process of collecting that data. But if I could just add to that that in 2019 we had an absolutely terrible year in terms of lives lost particularly; actually seven people in 2019 were killed just on those roads that we are talking about—those 90- or 100-kilometre-an-hour roads. So while I am not suggesting this is completely to do with the trial, since we implemented those speed limits in December 2019 nobody has been killed on those roads. While, like I say, this is not completely due to the trial, and the data over that short period of time is not particularly reliable—which is why we are going to be continuing to test that over the period—I think it shows very quickly just how necessary this sort of thing is. The huge waste on those roads in just one year is just totally unacceptable.

**Mr BAKER:** I just might add one point to that. The increased time in journeys for people travelling on those roads—I think the maximum amount of time in reducing those was about 90 seconds, 1½ minutes—

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Less than a minute.

**Mr BAKER:** Less than a minute; okay. So when we are looking at this for the number of lives that we have saved, we know there is a direct correlation between speed and road trauma and deaths; there just is.

**Mr GEPP:** And when that was explained to the community, they accepted that?

**Mr BAKER:** The majority did. Some objected, but the vast majority did, yes.

**Mr GEPP:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will pass over to Mr Barton and to Mr Meddick.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, gentlemen. The peninsula is a huge area, and you have got, really, a cross-section of roads. I am just curious—in that awful year of 2019, where was the most trauma and deaths happening? Was it on our normal roads? Was it on those back roads? Was it pedestrians getting around the shopping centres or schools or things like that? Where was the driver for all of those?

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you, Mr Barton. With seven people killed on those high-risk rural roads, that was the most concentrated environment of deaths. But if we look at data over a slightly longer period of time—so five years with the data analysis we have just done with our *Towards Zero* road safety strategy—we are looking at drivers and passengers still as 70 per cent of the people killed or seriously injured. We have about 13 per cent motorcyclists, 8 per cent cyclists and 7 per cent pedestrians. They are in very limited crash types too, which is why I was talking about this being predictable and preventable. Around 90 per cent of the fatal and serious injury crashes are in four crash types only, which means that with the appropriate level of funding we can actually target those areas and have a really significant reduction in the number of lives lost and people seriously injured.

**Mr BARTON:** Chair, one more question. Speed limits—you have obviously done the work, and some of the early signs are that maybe it is working; I think that is a good indicator that we are heading in the right direction there. But you have also got to bring the public along with those things, and one of the things that I am always a little surprised about is that when we have our speed limits with VicRoads and yourselves and that, we have a star rating for our roads, and we never actually let the public know this. For instance, when you have gone from a 100 k down to an 80 k, is there any value, do you think, in putting up the star rating—I am making

it up because I really do not know the actual detail—saying, ‘This is a 3-star road, and this is why we have gone to an 80 k’, and actually having the stars across the bottom of the speed limit that say, ‘This road doesn’t meet the same standard as the Mornington Peninsula Freeway’, for instance. Would there be any value in that, so people can say, ‘Well, this road is not up to speed’? Is there any value in that education to say, ‘This road is not at a standard of what other roads can be’?

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you, Mr Barton. Yes, look, there very well could be. One of the big challenges in implementing speed limit changes and other less traditional, I suppose, methods is that community engagement and bringing people along. We know that people on the Mornington Peninsula have generally been in favour of speed limit reductions on roads where they understand that we cannot practically install a wire rope barrier along hundreds of kilometres of our roads, and that sort of thing. But any tools that may help us to explain that to people and bring people along on the journey are worth exploring.

**Mr BAKER:** I think this goes as well to our Safe System approach around education. So for us, we know that there is an impact and a change in behaviour when people are informed. You see in many places, certainly in Europe I have seen signs saying—and I have seen them here as well—‘13 deaths on this road in the last six months’. It really has an impact. Information is powerful, so the more we can put out there the better.

**The CHAIR:** I might just pass to Mr Meddick if he has a question. Otherwise I understand the team has another appointment to attend to.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, gentlemen. I am quite impressed with your submission for a number of reasons, and before I ask my question I will very quickly cover that. First of all, it is because you have gone to a level of research here that is quite commendable, and it shows the depth of understanding of the problems within your particular area that has informed what you have written here and the steps that you want to take and that you have taken already. I think it is also commendable in that while you may not have realised it, I think this is an approach that could be expanded across the entire state and adapted to different conditions. I also like it because it follows a very time honoured and well worn path of what we had in the former industry I was in, the construction industry, and that is a hierarchy of control, and at the top of that hierarchy is always eliminate. Clearly we cannot eliminate road traffic, so the next step in the hierarchy of control is engineering controls, and I like in that instance what you have talked about in the construction of compact roundabouts for instance and the reduction in speed limits, which are two very clear engineering controls to stop a particular situation from occurring.

It is that aspect that I want to ask a question on. These compact cost-effective roundabouts, as you put them, are clearly adaptable to different situations. You talked about high-speed rural intersections and local street intersections. I would like to know the cost comparisons to other types of roundabouts that clearly you believe are much more expensive to begin with and then the differences, not just in cost but in physicality, between the high-speed intersections and the local street ones. I understand it is a complex one, and Chair, if we run out of time I am happy for the gentlemen to supply that in writing to us.

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you, Mr Meddick. We have done plenty of research and things, and it might be worth us providing something in writing to you. But just as an approximation, at the moment there is not a huge amount of examples of these. We have constructed a few in lower speed environments. There is one being trialled by the Department of Transport in Lance Creek. That is being evaluated and studied, and at the moment the Department of Transport are working on design notes for these sorts of things to be rolled out further. But it looks to be about half the cost of a regular standard roundabout, and the way that it does that is that it uses road safety platforms on approach to those roundabouts, so it actually uses vertical deflection rather than a larger roundabout to use lateral deflection. What it does is it means that you are not in a lot of cases required to acquire properties adjacent to the intersection. You are not required in a lot of cases to move services—power, Telstra services and other things like that that come at quite an enormous cost—and then just your footprint of construction is much lower. So in each of those different situations, whether it is arterial roads or whether it is rural roads or whether it is local roads, that footprint is much, much lower and around half the cost of a regular roundabout, which means that if funding stays the same you can treat twice the number of locations. At the moment, from the trials that have been done, it looks very comparable in terms of the speeds through those roundabouts, which is essentially what determines a level of road trauma that is suffered if there is a crash that occurs—it is that speed.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thanks so much.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much Tom, John and Davey from Mornington Peninsula shire. Like I said, we are on a tight schedule today. If committee members have follow-up questions, is it okay if we email you, John, to direct them to you, and you can get the team to reply? Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee I wish to say thank you very much for your presentation and contribution today.

**Mr HAINES-SUTHERLAND:** Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew.**