

# 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

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

**WITNESSES**

Dr Ben Rossiter, Executive Officer, and

Mr Duane Burt, Principal Policy Adviser, Victoria Walks.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome 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 the live broadcast. My name is Enver Erdogan, and I am the Chair of the committee. I would like to also acknowledge my fellow members of the committee that are present here today: Mrs Beverley McArthur, Mr Mark Gepp, Mr Lee Tarlamis, Mr Andy Meddick and Mr Rod Barton.

Before we begin, Mr Burt and Dr Rossiter, I will have to read out a short witness statement. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and by 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 your opening comments but ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to ensure that we have plenty of time for discussion. 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 committee staff using the contacts you have been provided. Could you please give your names for the benefit of our Hansard team and then start your presentation. Thank you.

**Mr BURTT:** Duane Burt.

**Visual presentation.**

**Dr ROSSITER:** My name is Ben Rossiter. I am the Executive Officer, and Duane Burt is our principal adviser. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard. Victoria Walks is an evidence-based walking health promotion organisation established with funding from VicHealth in 2009, and I will provide a short presentation on some of the key issues.

One in six transport trips are undertaken entirely on foot, and most people get to and from public transport by walking. Walking is also the most popular active recreation of Victorians, and a lot of this occurs on the road network on footpaths. Walkers are our most vulnerable road users and are four times more likely to be injured in road crashes than any other road user. Pedestrian deaths, shown in the green columns here, have been trending downward for over 20 years, with a big reduction when the default urban speed limit was reduced to 50 kilometres an hour in 2001. However, pedestrian fatalities are not declining as fast as the overall road toll. In 2019 pedestrians were the highest proportion of overall fatalities in more than 10 years. There has been little or no decline in pedestrian injuries in the last decade as well. Hospital admissions have not dropped at all and are stubbornly stuck at around 1000 a year.

While overall fatalities have been dropping for two decades, older people are an increasing proportion of those killed and injured while walking, and this increase has been occurring faster than the population is ageing. In 2019 people over 70 years of age were 41 per cent of pedestrian fatalities, even though they make up only 11 per cent of the population. So far this year there have been 14 fewer pedestrian fatalities compared to the same time last year. Why? Because 14 fewer pedestrians over 60 years of age have been killed. We suspect this has little to do with improved road safety and more to do with coronavirus. Now, it is important to understand that older people are not over-represented because they are losing the ability to walk or generally making bad decisions about crossing the road; it is their comparative frailty that makes them more likely to be killed or injured. Walking is the main form of exercise for older people, and it is important to help them stay connected to their community and out of aged care. We have to build a road environment that looks after them and is inviting to walk in. With our rapidly ageing population, unless we have change, pedestrian road trauma will increase.

Despite being central to our transport system, pedestrians are neglected in road safety and transport planning and investment. In fact we continue to repeat the mistakes of the past. We design roads to maximise traffic flow even where we expect significant growth in foot traffic. The Fairfield paper mill site in this image is an example. It will house 5000 people, but the new Chandler Highway construction resulted in wider roads and new slip lanes to facilitate traffic speed. This makes the area less safe for pedestrians and creates an intimidating environment that will make it harder for people to walk from the development to the train station and local shops and residents of Fairfield to walk to the Yarra River.

Walking cuts across many, many areas of government. We need a whole-of-government walking strategy, linked to road safety, to deliver coordinated pedestrian planning and investment. There are plenty of options for changing our streets to make them safer and easier for walking. They range from formal crossings to median treatments and other informal crossing aids through to changes in the way traffic signals work. Half of pedestrian crashes occur at intersections, and people are often hit by turning drivers who were legally required to give way. The raised threshold in this photo forces drivers to slow when they are turning, and the design emphasises the need to give way to pedestrians.

If we are to reduce the road toll, we need pedestrian-specific road safety and infrastructure funding to deliver these improvements, and we say \$100 million per annum is a start. We also need better standards and guidelines in road management to ensure consistent design that improves road safety. We need dedicated pedestrian expertise—pedestrian champions, if you like—within transport and road safety agencies, because the approach of just having generalists is clearly not working for walkers. We need changes to road rules as many are inconsistent or confusing. For example, a driver must give way to walkers crossing the road they are turning into but not the road they are turning out of, so we have the absurd situation where walkers have priority at intersections for only half the street they are crossing.

Current planning provisions can also undermine road safety—for example, minimum car parking requirements force businesses to provide more parking than they need and create areas that are unpleasant and unsafe to walk in, resulting in more vehicles on the roads. So why are we not investing in modal shift as a road safety strategy? If we encourage other forms of transport rather than driving, there will be fewer cars on the road and fewer fatalities. That is a big part of how European countries have reduced their road toll. So, increasing rates of walking to school, for example, should be a goal of road safety, but it is not. Importantly, we need to resist calls to allow bicycles, e-scooters and other types of vehicles onto footpaths—apart from as genuine mobility aids for people who need them.

Now, Victoria has high urban speeds on residential streets and in high-pedestrian areas by international comparison. We also have a problem with our arterials that is not being adequately addressed. A third of pedestrian crashes occur on 60 kilometre-an-hour arterials, which are a minority of the overall road network, and they are usually state controlled. Speed limits are easy, quick and cheap to change compared to infrastructure. From this table you can see the risk of being killed when hit by a vehicle increases exponentially above 40 kilometres an hour, and at 60 kilometres an hour it is effectively a death sentence.

But in practice our speed guidelines have few 40-kilometre-an-hour options for road managers and effectively none for 30 kilometres an hour. Also, our state road agency must approve speed changes, but decisions are often not transparent and can end up with ministers overruling the experts. We also hear decision-makers often saying that we need to take the community along when we lower speeds, but this is poor leadership and simply passing the buck. Past road safety initiatives were based on expert opinion and fact, not on getting community support. If we had waited for community support, we would probably not have compulsory seat belts, blood alcohol limits, speed cameras, red-light cameras and even roadworthy testing.

Now, since we made our submission new information has come to light from a Monash University study for Victoria Walks, including that police deem drivers to be offending in 46 per cent of crashes, and we know from research we are currently undertaking police think drivers are at fault in the majority of crashes. We clearly need driver-centred road safety campaigns, particularly relating to the road rules. We think things like concentrating on pedestrian distraction, as some appear to be doing, can be a distraction from the key issues causing pedestrian road trauma, particularly for older walkers who are not listening to music and updating their profiles while they walk. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that concise but informative presentation. I might pass over to Mr Tarlamis to ask the first question then pass over to Mr Barton.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** Thank you, Ben and Duane, for your submission and presentation today. You reference in your submission and also in your presentation the benefits of investing in modal shifts from driving to walking and cycling. I know that you said we should resist the attempts to move e-bikes onto footpaths, but do you see e-scooters and e-bikes as being part of the solution as part of that modal shift?

**Dr ROSSITER:** Yes, we do see them but not on footpaths. It is quite clear that we would like to see them, and I think they have a really clear place in our transport network, but they need to be on the road—as they are nearly everywhere around the world.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** You also touched on recommending investing in walking more and walking to train stations, with the investment of \$100 million over four years. Can you break down that figure a little bit and talk to us little bit more about what specific projects or initiatives you would prioritise as part of that objective?

**Dr ROSSITER:** Yes. I think we need to have as safe, convenient and direct walking routes to the key destinations, and obviously train stations are really key activity centres. Something like a third of all people who live within 800 metres of train stations drive—800 metres as the crow flies—because they are not direct, they are not safe and they are not convenient. So that is part of that modal shift. Let us invest in them, give them priority and do the key areas first, and that would be train stations, activity centres and also schools.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I might pass on to Mr Barton to ask a question.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ben and Duane. You get no argument from me; I think yes. I am a little interested in the groups of over 70. Could you just expand—why are they so highly in the stats?

**Dr ROSSITER:** A big increase last year, a massive jump, and we have to see if this trend will continue over time, but it has been increasing. If you think over a 20-year period, the over 60 went from 43 per cent up to 48 per cent and 50 per cent last year—and similar jumps in injuries. And this is happening nationally as well. There are probably a variety of reasons. Ageing of the population is one, but it is more than that. We have not designed our road environment around people. The frailty of seniors—when hit, unfortunately, they tend to stay hit. Also we suspect there will be things like it is very difficult to get out of the way as we age. We cannot prove that, but I think walking around the urban network it is quite easy to jump out of the way as you are younger. We know from research we conducted a number of years ago, *Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians*, that 16 per cent of pedestrian crashes with those over the age of 60 actually occur on footpaths—so things like drivers coming in and out of driveways and car parks—and it is actually 23 per cent for those over the age of 85. So we are not designing a road network that facilitates walking. It also links to things like falls in the street—similar research that 5000 Victorians end up in hospital and emergency departments from falling in the street. We all fall, but it has a particular impact on seniors. Because we have a really poor walking environment—footpaths and crossing points—they tend to be looking at their feet so they do not trip and not the road network for when drivers are not paying attention or not giving way. So the two issues would be poor road design and poor driver behaviour when it comes to seniors.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I might pass over to Mrs McArthur, then Mr Meddick.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, gentlemen. Look, this is a very inside-the-tram-tracks approach, isn't it? I mean, out here in country Victoria we do not have public transport, let alone the ability to walk from Geelong to Melbourne, for example, or places in between. You want to spend \$100 million on this project. Where do you suggest we cut \$100 million from somewhere else to spend on more pedestrian safety? And it seems to me your suggestion that there is no fault in the older population—and I fall into that category, so I am talking about myself here. I was travelling through Winchelsea the other day and the lights went green at a crossing in the middle of the town and an elderly person walked straight out in front of all the traffic that was going through a green light. They were in the right; the pedestrian was totally in the wrong. How do you stop that behaviour? There was a near miss, nearly a shocking accident, about to occur. How would you prevent that? It is not going to be a matter of fixing up the roads or the footpaths.

**Dr ROSSITER:** I think there are a few things in there. One of them is people make mistakes. We are human. We just should not pay with our life when we make mistakes. I will point out some research that the TAC did about 10 years ago looking at seniors injured in road crashes. They found that they were only at fault in 12 per cent of crashes, so by and large seniors are not at fault, but people do make mistakes. So it is about trying to create a road environment, particularly in our urban areas, that protects them so that if you are hit or you do something a bit silly you do not pay with your life. I think that is a really key thing.

I have not been through Winchelsea recently; I used to go through there a lot. But the main road going through it is designed to get vehicles through Winchelsea as quick as possible, not to get people actually around and across and walking to shops. Seniors, for instance, increasingly need to get around to live their everyday life but also connect with the community. So we have to think of what our priorities are: should that be access and ability of seniors to participate and stay active as long as possible? Because if we do not, the economic costs are going to be far greater if they are not going to be able to stay healthy and active and participate in the community.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** But what can you do if you have lights which are designed to let pedestrians cross but you do not observe those?

**Dr ROSSITER:** That can happen, but I would say the data has shown that is a minority of cases. Yes, that can happen, so if we have it, I think, in our urban areas, that is where we have a slower speed limit and design for slower speed in high pedestrian areas and where people are walking around.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** But this would be nothing to do with the speed limit. The lights went green, cars were going to go through it, three lanes of cars, and the pedestrian walked straight out across the green light—so nothing to do with the speed limit, nothing to do with anything else. But can I just ask you: you referred to the Monash University study. Would that be the same group that is funded by the government to advocate for wire rope barriers?

**Dr ROSSITER:** I am not sure. You would have to ask them what they are funded by the government for. But it is Monash University Accident Research Centre.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** That is them. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Meddick, and then I will go last.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for your submission and for your presentation here today. It is worth noting that there are two other regional MPs on this panel at the moment, and I do not think for a moment that any of us would consider that the lives of those living in an urban environment have any less value than those who are living in the regional areas. I think it is the work of this committee to hear all solutions that save all lives no matter where they are.

In that instance I am interested in what you were talking about with this separation of electric scooters and cyclists et cetera. Clearly that means no shared footpaths, as we would see quite a lot. We see them in Geelong, in a regional area, for instance; in the major regional centres we do see them. There is that potential for conflict and the coming together of a slow-moving individual, as in someone walking, and a fast-moving individual on a bike. Separation is obviously the key here. Is the solution, then, to force all of them—so cyclists, scooters, skateboard riders, all those sorts of things—out onto the roads, or is it a second footpath that is just separately for those types of vehicles? I know electric scooters are in their infancy here in Australia at the moment, regardless of where you are, even in the major urban centres like Melbourne; they are around, but they are in their infancy. Is it something that we need to look at in the future, that we need to provide a second pathway where that is allowable or even conceivable through usage, that they need to be constructed, or do we just, as I say, put them out onto the roads? In an urban environment in particular—if we talk about Melbourne—there is not a lot of scope for widening of roads. Things are pretty well set and have been for quite a long time. Are we then just moving the risk factor from one place to another, where we run the risk of these people who use these modes of transport being at a greater risk than they currently are? Because I know that was the thinking in moving them off the roads in the first place onto the shared footpath situation—so there was no conflict with motor vehicles.

The second question I have got is just talking about this \$100 million that you raised there. I would like to know what that looks like in terms of these footpaths and other things. Is it much wider footpaths? Is it better lighting? Is it access for people with disabilities—so no steps but more a ramping situation? What do these things all look like? Because the more things that you add, obviously the cost increases and your \$100 million rapidly gets depleted.

**Dr ROSSITER:** Good questions. There is a lot in there, so hopefully I can get to all of them. Firstly I would just reassert that when we say ‘urban environments’ we are talking urban across the state—towns, cities, regional areas. We are not just Melbourne; we really are talking across the state, and that is a really important point.

Shared paths were initially designed to be low-speed, low-volume environments and recreational. They can work like regional area rail trails—yes, that makes sense—but we have a real problem when we are combining them with particularly commuter cyclists and sport cyclists. In Melbourne some of our shared paths have up to nearly 1000 cyclists in an hour. They are really quite hostile; they are not designed for walking. Our research shows that about 40 per cent of seniors find shared paths a moderate to major barrier to their walking—stops them walking. So they do not work, and they do not work for either mode.

The thing with footpaths is that they are not designed for cycling as well. They are not designed for e-scooters and fast-moving traffic. They have overhanging branches, they are in poor condition and there are cars coming into and out of driveways, and there is not research saying they are any safer. In fact cyclists have greater risk of crash on the footpath. They might be more severe sometimes on roadways, but the crash risk is quite high. So we say where there are higher volumes they need to be separated and we cannot have a situation where the most vulnerable—seniors, people with disabilities—are disadvantaged the most. I think that is a key thing with shared paths: they do not work for both modes, walking and cycling. We should not be doing them. We probably do it more than most countries around the world.

The idea of crossing infrastructure and pedestrian infrastructure—the biggest risk for pedestrians is crossing the road and ability to cross the road. So depending on the roadways, that will be things like both raised thresholds. It might be reducing the distance particularly, as I say, that seniors have to cross when they cross the road. It will be formal crossings, informal crossings, changing the road environment. And \$100 million might sound like a lot, but as you indicate, it can go pretty quickly. So there are a variety of things it really needs to do, but we would say prioritise around the areas where people need to get to, where there are higher proportions that need to get to school, to shops, to public transport, to activity centres—and that can be in the regional centres and regional towns that people need to walk to.

I would also say that there is research around the world showing that people who walk to their local shops tend to go more frequently, stay longer and often spend more money over the longer term than people who drive. People who drive can tend to take their money out of a local community to a bigger shopping centre. There are also economic benefits to local business by getting people walking and walkable areas. Have I answered everything there?

**The CHAIR:** Thank you; very comprehensive. I might ask a question to Duane, actually, but obviously I would be very pleased to hear from both of you. I was glad about the point about the separation between pedestrians, because walking is probably—and I have seen during these times, in COVID—the most common form of exercise as well as a necessity to go shopping. As someone who lives in inner Melbourne, what I have noticed is the potential danger for pedestrians by other modes of transport, such as cyclists in particular—living in inner Melbourne, that is also quite a popular exercise—especially for the elderly members of our community, with cyclists screaming past at quite considerable speeds. Is there something, Duane, that needs to be done about enforcement of the road rules towards cyclists? Because increasingly I think cycling and pedestrians are using shared paths in inner Melbourne. I can see dangers. Is there something to be done? I know road rule enforcement on vehicles with registrations is quite comprehensive, but I sometimes feel—I do not know: is the enforcement is lacking in this space, and what could be done? To Duane, please.

**Mr BURTT:** I think there is certainly room for more enforcement. We would like to see more infringements issued for riding on the footpath. We know the police do not issue many infringements for that. But it is very difficult to control the behaviour of cyclists in some of these conditions. On shared paths, for example, trying to control their speed is difficult. So that is why we have always advocated for solutions that involve providing

infrastructure for cyclists rather than trying to control cyclists' behaviour on shared paths. There is certainly room for that. But we would like to see things like separated bike paths and separated lanes on the road, and we think they would provide the best environment for people to use things like e-scooters as well. So that is where we would really like to see e-scooter riders and bike riders—on dedicated paths or dedicated lanes on the road, or low-speed roads. There is definitely plenty of room for lower speed limits on the road as well.

**The CHAIR:** One last point: I guess going on with what Mr Meddick said, for a lot of inner Melbourne, obviously with the laneways and old cottage houses et cetera, some of that infrastructure to have separate paths for cyclists—I agree, that is probably the best solution—and considerable infrastructure spend to create separate pathways, is not possible because of the limited way that the actual suburbs have already been built in built-up areas. So enforcement, a bit of policy work around them and some advocacy from organisations such as yours would be helpful because I think there are a lot of organisations advocating for other modes of transport, but I think pedestrians and walking can sometimes be not as prioritised. So keep up the work.

On that note I realise that we are on a tight schedule today, and on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you both, Ben and Duane, for your contribution and presentation. It has been quite enjoyable from my perspective, because I live in inner Melbourne, to hear from you both. The committee will now take a short 5-minute break before our next witness. Thank you.

**Mr BURTT:** Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**