

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 Andrea Bunting, Convenor, and

Ms Carmel Boyce, Social Planner, Walk on Moreland; and

Dr Jeremy Lawrence, Founder and Director, Streets Alive Yarra.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Increase in Victoria's Road Toll. I wish to welcome any members of the public that are watching via the live broadcast. My name is Enver Erdogan and I am Chair of the committee. I would also like to acknowledge my fellow members of the committee: Mr Mark Gepp, Mr Lee Tarlamis, Mr Rod Barton, Mrs Beverley McArthur and Mr Andy Meddick.

I will now read a short witness statement. 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 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 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 begin by stating your name for the benefit of the Hansard team and then start the presentation. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Dr BUNTING: I will present first and then Carmel second. My name is Andrea Bunting from Walk on Moreland, and my fellow presenter is Carmel Boyce. Our group, Walk on Moreland, is a community group that has formed to lobby on pedestrian safety in Moreland. Moreland is actually Victoria's second-worst municipality for pedestrian road trauma after the City of Melbourne, and our pedestrian fatality rate is nearly double the state's average. Very worryingly, more than half of road deaths in Moreland are actually pedestrians. So it is a key issue for us, but we also think that this is not just about Moreland. Our insights could be useful for many other areas, because the problems we are facing in the inner north of Melbourne are likely to be spread to other areas in the state as they grow in population and become more dense. And our submission is also relevant to Victoria's many vulnerable road users because they are finding it increasingly difficult to walk in their local streets as a result of this tension between different road users that is coming to a head in the inner-Melbourne suburbs—and also our regional cities, I believe. I will hand over to Carmel Boyce.

Sorry—the second slide was also me. If you could flip the slide, please. That was what I just covered, and then Carmel will go onto the next slide. Thank you.

Ms BOYCE: What we wanted to do today was to take you through why pedestrians are important, and the first thing we wanted to do was to encourage you to think about why people walk. Walking is actually the cheapest, healthiest, most accessible and most environmentally benign transport mode in an integrated transport system, with the widest variety of health benefits. Next slide, please. These health benefits include: it enhances mood and reduces depression; it improves lifestyle disease outcomes, particularly cardiovascular disease and obesity; it reduces the likelihood of dementia; and it provides an opportunity for people to meet the national physical activity guidelines. There is a whole range of community benefits, including promoting conviviality, economic vitality, livability and community safety. There is a whole range of social inclusion benefits, including the inclusion of people with a disability, all younger people and older people who are non-drivers as well as just normal non-drivers, and it reduces social isolation in the aged and promotes friendship.

The economic benefits are significant. Local economies are supported by people that walk. They access local schools, shops, parks and amenities, and pedestrians spend more locally than any other population group. The

environmental benefits include reducing pollution, better air quality and lower emissions. But importantly, there are gender equity benefits as well. More women walk than men routinely as part of their daily physical activity, and that is an important method of recreation activity for women.

What we know, though, is that reductions in the road toll have not resulted in a reduction in pedestrian death and that every pedestrian death discourages people walking. The concern about the potential risk of injury when people see someone injured or killed further discourages walking. We understand from evidence that in locations where walking rates are low the rates of death and disability, adjusted life years as a result of lifestyle diseases and dementia rates are higher, communities are less safe and less convivial and their local economies are less vibrant.

What we know is what we experience in the inner city is that density has not created safer walking environments. There is increased contestability on through routes, both arterial and local roads, which discourages walking and sustainable transport. This is evidenced in rat-running, traffic congestion, pollution, difficulty and delay in crossing the road, increased pedestrian and cycling deaths, serious injuries and injuries. Density has not provided better environments for pedestrians—so encouraging more people to walk more often or better designed pedestrian environments or environments with more amenity that support more people walking more often or vulnerable road users walking locally and using public transport.

Our submission went to a number of solutions, and we will go through these quite quickly. The solutions are based around the fundamental understanding that pedestrians have a right to life and they have a right to access and participate in the community and to independent mobility, and these rights are protected in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. We think there is some equity-focused impact assessment work of current unsafe conditions and proposed solutions that needs to be done rather than just engineering roads for cars. We think there is statewide guidance on pedestrian-supportive design that can be endorsed and supported and encouraged. We think coordinated planning is really important, particularly with a vulnerable road user focus. We think the current road warrants system needs to be thought about because at the moment it only supports walking across the road when you can count the number of pedestrians rather than acknowledging that there are some things that people need to get to on the other side of the road and just introducing the amenity.

We need to increase the power of local government to intervene in local communities to support local focus—things like local shopping precincts, pedestrian amenity around community infrastructure, reducing road speeds so people can cross the road to get their shopping, so they can pick up their groceries at night and get to schools and halls and pools and parks and aged-care facilities and maternal and child health centres. We think there are road management solutions as well. We think fundamentally they need to start with an understanding of the role that pedestrians play in the transport system. We think more needs to be done to discourage through traffic in shopping precincts, to reduce the speeds in local areas and local streets and to invest in pedestrian-supportive design interventions, so wider footpaths, raised pedestrian crossings, kerb extensions, removing corner splays, removing footpath obstacles—sometimes bus shelters are in the middle of a footpath—and separating infrastructure by mode so there are clear delineations between the street and the road.

Additionally, we think there are some improvements that are clearly pedestrian focused and relate to crossing the road—just getting across and staying alive. These include reducing light response times; increasing walk times so that vulnerable pedestrians can get across the road in time; increasing pedestrian crossing density and frequency in areas where pedestrians are supported, so in local activity precincts; installing new signalling links on pedestrian crossings, so ensuring people can get across a crossing in the easiest and most direct way possible; and removing signalling conflicts. For instance, when you signal left-hand turns and pedestrians are standing on a corner that has been splayed, pedestrians are not necessarily visible and often are run over at that point. Those conflicts need to be eliminated just to make people safe.

We think there are public education campaigns that need to be thought about as well. These need to be focused on all transport modes, not just cars or trucks or motorcycles. We think some pedestrian-supportive public education is important, but these include not scaring pedestrians about their safety but clearly promoting the benefits of walking to communities' economies, environment and health. We think there needs to be a significant effort to enforce the current road rules so pedestrians are not at risk and to ensure funding for interventions flow from identified risk but not actual death counts. At the moment VicRoads funds interventions based on the number of deaths. We think there are clearly identifiable risk issues that could be dealt with before people lose their lives. I think that is the end of our submission.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I would now like to pass to Mr Barton to ask the first question, and then we will go to Mr Meddick, Mr Tarlamis and then Mrs Bev McArthur. I just want to remind people: could we please keep questions and answers to a maximum of 2 minutes so everyone has an opportunity.
Dr Lawrence.

Dr LAWRENCE: Can I speak first, Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Dr LAWRENCE: My name is Jeremy Lawrence, representing Streets Alive Yarra, which is a non-profit volunteer resident and ratepayer action group with a vision for beautiful, livable and accessible neighbourhoods. Our mission is to offer at no cost a platform for locals to publish ideas for how to improve their street, such as fixing footpaths, adding trees or improving safety. I reside in the City of Yarra and am a registered professional engineer. I am a member of the Australian Institute of Traffic Planning and Management and the Australasian College of Road Safety. I have completed a VicRoads training course in Safe System principles and Safe System assessment.

The view of Streets Alive Yarra is that progress in addressing Victoria's road toll is unacceptably slow. Solutions are readily available, but the government is failing to implement them. People who would prefer to walk or cycle are being dissuaded from doing so by poor-quality infrastructure and the risk of being killed or seriously injured by other people driving cars. Solutions that have been demonstrated in other countries do not need to be reinvented, put in trial or adapted for Victoria. They merely need to be implemented.

Solutions that the Victorian state government can implement include: number one, reducing the severity of crashes by defining 30 kilometres per hour as the default speed limit for local streets—all non-arterial roads; defining 40 kilometres per hour as the default speed limit for declared arterials, such as the ones that are not preferred traffic routes; and defining 80 kilometres per hour as the default speed limit for highways that do not have centre and edge dividing barriers. Number two, offering viable alternatives to driving by building a public transport network that can move people in a city of 8 million, as described by the Melbourne rail plan 2050 from the Rail Futures Institute; upgrading all public transport stops to level access for DDA compliance; providing funding to councils to build best practice and DDA-compliant footpaths between public transport stops and people's homes; and building a network of protected bicycle lanes. Then number three, smoothing the peak hour curve by introducing demand-responsive driving charges on all arterials that are congested.

Overall, Streets Alive Yarra considers investment in walking, cycling and public transport is a win-win. Not only would it decrease the road toll, it would also decrease costs to the taxpayer over a lifetime basis because of lower population health costs. The positive business case for such investment has been documented in many studies for many countries. We could spend \$635 million per year in Victoria on infrastructure for walking and cycling or \$100 per person per year and it would be, over generational timescales, a saving for the taxpayer. Translated to the City of Yarra, this would be an investment of \$10 million per year, and we have a page on our website which validates this level of expenditure. As we come out of COVID and people initially avoid public transport, we need to avoid a spike in the road toll caused by a massive increase in driving. We can avoid this. We should avoid this. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Just for members of the public that are watching via live video broadcast, previously we had Andrea Bunting and Carmel Boyce from Walk on Moreland, and that was Dr Jeremy Lawrence from Streets Alive Yarra, and both have advocated for greater, I guess, investment in pedestrian infrastructure as well as other active transport modes. What I might do is pass on to Mr Rod Barton to ask the first question, then Mr Lee Tarlamis to ask the second question, and we will go from there. Mr Barton, I will allow you to ask a question and a supplementary, so two questions, please.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your presentation. I am certainly of the view and hopefully through this committee we are grasping that moving people to public transport will help with our road safety. I think that is something that is becoming more and more apparent for more and more people, so I think that is a great move. In terms of Moreland, if I understood you correctly, your pedestrian fatalities are double the state's average. Apart from the things where you want to work, why is that, why are you so out of step with other areas?

Ms BOYCE: Andrea, will you do that?

Dr BUNTING: Yes, I will do that. Thank you very much, Mr Barton. We are nearly double the state average and that is over the last 10 years. I think part of the reason is we have Sydney Road, which I will say is a major problem for pedestrian trauma. But we have a lot of streets that have a lot of through traffic, but also where people will shop and dine, there is a lot of walking along those streets, people walking across to restaurants at night, plus there is through traffic. So I think as an inner-suburban municipality we have that tension with the road through traffic and people using the streets for their own residential purposes. Perhaps that is one of the main reasons. But I know there are various hotspots in Sydney Road, in our shopping areas particularly.

Mr BARTON: Streets Alive Yarra's submission—you have put a number of things in there which I absolutely agree with. I will just say two things here: mandate licence retesting after 10 years—there are not a lot of people supporting that. In my experience as a professional driver I do know people's driving does not get better after 40 years of driving and people drop off at different rates, so I absolutely agree with that. Have you got any data to back that up, or how do you support that position?

Dr LAWRENCE: No, I have not done independent research and cannot offer specific data to support that. I picked 10 years because I thought it was a perishable skill. Apart from that, it is only my personal experience that I travelled overseas and got my licence in Germany, more than a decade after I got my licence in Australia, and I had to pass the German test. I thought my skills had deteriorated measurably and distinctly, and so I needed brush-up training to pass my test in Germany.

Mr BARTON: I will allow everybody else to have a go with questions. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Yes. We should have time to come back to you, Mr Barton. Mr Tarlamis.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you Dr Bunting, Carmel and Dr Lawrence for your presentation and submission. My question is to Dr Lawrence. You mentioned in your submission but also in your presentation that road safety design should be guided by best practice, and in your submission you referenced I think Denmark and the Netherlands. Can you go into a bit more detail about the models used in those countries and how they could be utilised to maximise road safety in Victoria?

Dr LAWRENCE: So in particular the Netherlands have an approach that they call Sustainable Safety, which is similar to our Vision Zero or *Towards Zero*, and the basic idea there is that they have predictive analysis—so you would look at a street, do a risk-based analysis of the geometry, identify where crashes could occur and then mitigate them by design. It is much less focus on enforcement and a much greater focus on infrastructure that guides the behaviour of the road users. Clear examples would be: you have a separate lane for a footpath, a bicycle path and a motor vehicle, and you have protected intersections that guide the different road users on clear paths so that they have clear vision to each other. So a bicycle path would not go straight through—it would deviate around—and a motorist would have to turn a corner around a bollard and they would have a clear vision to the cyclist and therefore they are able to pause and brake before a collision occurs.

Mr TARLAMIS: Okay, thank you. You also mentioned in your submission around the adequacy and accuracy of road collision data, and the example you stated was: the street may have recorded zero cyclist deaths in the last 10 years not because it is safe but because it is so dangerous that cyclists do not dare to use it. You recommend that an iRAP road safety star-rating assessment of all roads in Victoria should be conducted with direct funding [Zoom dropout].

In regard to the adequacy of the road toll I was basically saying that you are recommending that we conduct an iRAP road safety star-rating assessment of all roads in Victoria to direct funding to lift roads up to at least a 3-star level. I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that.

Dr LAWRENCE: There are a number of ways of assessing road safety. One is the Safe System assessment method that VicRoads have. The other is the iRAP star rating. I propose the star-rating system because there is a set of software and processes around that that are well documented that are used in other countries. And I thought public policy should be based on the evidence, and this is a very clear evidence pathway to guide investment. Additionally, it is a really great way to involve the public in the policy and expenditure development process. So if you are saying, 'Let's spend a certain amount of money fixing these roads', you will naturally say, 'Well, it's my taxpayer money. Why am I doing this?'. The star rating system provides a method of saying, 'This is at present a 2-star road and we're going to lift it to a 3-star road and that will cost a

certain amount of money, but these are the benefits for you'. People intrinsically understand stars. They see them on their fridges and their washing machines.

Mr TARLAMIS: With your indulgence, Chair, just following up and picking up on a point that Andy made in a previous presentation: do you think it would change drivers' behaviour if, working on the basis of a star-rating system, where there was a change in speed zones from say 100 to 80, there was on that signage a star rating indicating that the speed was changing because the road was less safe—and that is one of the reasons why that would in some way change the driver's behaviour, if you like, on the basis that they accept that that is the reason for that decrease in speed perhaps?

Dr LAWRENCE: I have not seen any research to show that changing or altering the road signs has that measurable impact on driver behaviour. I think the star rating is a message that occurs in public consultation and government publications as opposed to through the road sign system.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: A couple of my questions have already been asked by previous members of the committee. I will give my question rights to Mr Barton, so Mr Barton, feel free to ask two more questions, please.

Mr BARTON: That is very generous of you, Chair. Thank you. Jeremy, one of your recommendations incentivised the uptake of new vehicles with low emissions—yes, good. We also know that more people are killed in vehicles which are more than 10 years old. Currently the only time we do a vehicle roadworthy certificate inspection is when the vehicle changes hands, so you could actually buy a car and have it in your possession for 20 years and it never actually gets checked for roadworthiness. Now, in New South Wales we know that once vehicles become more than four years old, they have to then produce a roadworthy certificate every 12 months. Do you think that would help encourage people to think about getting a new car if they had to keep fronting up and having a roadworthy done once their car was getting seven, eight, nine or 10 years old and things started deteriorating?

Dr LAWRENCE: Yes, certainly. It is natural human behaviour that you need a trigger to make a decision, and the need to get a roadworthy and the need to think about your contribution to the broader road safety issue can certainly come from that requirement to get a road safety assessment.

Mr BARTON: You would be surprised to know that taxis and hire cars in Victoria no longer have to have a licensed vehicle tester but a vehicle inspection every 12 months, as opposed to a proper test.

Dr LAWRENCE: I am not aware.

Mr BARTON: There you go. Feel free—that for nothing. If anybody else wants to ask a question, that will do.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Barton. Mr Meddick, do you have a question?

Mr MEDDICK: No.

The CHAIR: If that is the case, I would just like to thank Walk on Moreland and Streets Alive Yarra. I enjoyed reading the submissions and also the presentations today, and it has been an interesting discussion. The committee now needs to take a short break before our next witnesses. It has been a pleasure. Thank you.

Dr LAWRENCE: Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.