

# **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

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

Melbourne—Wednesday, 23 September 2020

*(via videoconference)*

### **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

**WITNESS**

Mr Arild Engebretsen, Senior Adviser, Traffic Safety, Transport and Society, Norwegian Public Roads Administration.

**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 who are watching via the live broadcast. My name is Enver Erdogan, and I am Chair of the committee. I would like to introduce fellow members of the committee who are members of the Legislative Council: Mr Rod Barton, Mr Lee Tarlamis, Mr Bernie Finn, Mr Mark Gepp, Mr Tim Quilty and Mrs Beverley McArthur.

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 provided during this hearing is protected by law. However, any comments 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, and 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 are kept to a maximum of 5 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 our Hansard team, and then start your introduction. Mr Engebretsen.

**Mr ENGBRETSEN:** Arild Engebretsen, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. Would you like to do a short introduction of who you are and a bit on your policy expertise, and then committee members can ask questions?

**Mr ENGBRETSEN:** Yes. I was thinking about saying some brief things about Norway and the traffic safety concerns here. Of course my name is Arild Engebretsen. I am a Senior Adviser in Traffic Safety at the Norwegian Public Roads Administration. I am an economist from the University of Oslo and I finished at university in the 90s, but University of Oslo is one of the best economic universities in the world. So that you understand what Norway is, I have some facts about Norway.

We have almost 5.4 million inhabitants. That is some fewer than the Victorian state, and we are around 285 200 square kilometres—one and a half times Victoria—and we have almost 4 million cars in the country. The average age of a passenger car is about 10.5 years old, and we have quite a lot of roads. We have around 97 000 kilometres with public roads. We have 120 000 kilometres with private roads, and we do not have a lot of motorways—about 550 kilometres of motorways—1 100 road tunnels, and it is about 46 000 vehicle kilometres driven on those roads a year.

When it comes to accidents, in 2019 it was about—not about, it was—3579 police-reported traffic accidents with killed or injured in Norway. In these accidents, there were 108 killed persons, 565 seriously injured and 3589 slightly injured persons, and the total estimated cost of these accidents is about 8 million Norwegian crowns. That is about A\$1.2 billion.

The most common accident type is head-on accidents: 40 of these people were killed in head-on accidents in 2019. The second largest is driven-off-the-road accidents, and 37 people were killed in driven-off-the-road accidents in 2019. With all accidents with people killed we have an in-depth analysis of it, and that in-depth analysis shows that speed contributes to about 40 per cent of the accidents with killed persons. So speeding is a problem, and it is estimated that in Norway 61.7 per cent of the driving in Norway is on speed limit or below. So speeding is quite a problem in Norway. Thirty per cent of the accidents with killed had either alcohol or drugs, and we do not know anything about the amount of drink and driving in Norway. We think it is about a maximum of 1 per cent, but we are not sure.

When it comes to consequences of accidents that is quite important. In Norway, about 96 per cent of all traffic or all drivers and passengers are using seat belts when they are driving, but 37 per cent of the killed persons in accidents do not use a seatbelt. And we have a problem because we are quite good in Norway, and the problem is a combination of speed, drinking, drugs and not using seat belts. That is the same persons. It is a quite hard group to reach. But all in all, it is not too cocky to say that Norway is one of the safest countries in the world when it comes to road traffic. But we have reached a level where it is very hard to get further down. We are struggling a little bit now, but it has taken us a lot of good work to get where we are. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Takk skal du ha. Is that ‘thank you’ in Norwegian, or am I not close?

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** Very close: takk skal du ha.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I might pass over to Mr Gepp for the first question.

**Mr GEPP:** Thank you. The Chair was showing off with his Norwegian, and I will not embarrass myself or indeed Mr Engebretsen with any poor attempt at my own Norwegian. I butcher the English language, let alone trying another. Thank you so much for joining us today. I think we are very envious, looking at the statistics of Norway and that you are considered one of the safest, if not the safest, countries in the world for road safety. It is interesting you mentioned that you have reached a bit of a plateau. Our friends from Sweden also said the same thing. They are struggling as well, as I am sure you are familiar with, taking that next step to further drive down the road toll. I am particularly interested in the structure of the organisation that you work for, the public roads administration. We have a few component bits to our roads—in road management, vehicles et cetera. I was wondering if you could take us through the structure of your organisation, the one in Norway, to see how it all pieces together to come up with the public policy positions that you have got.

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** Thank you. The organisation—this is quite complicated nowadays because we have just reorganised the whole sector in Norway, but the Norwegian Public Roads Administration has a directorate on the top who makes the rules for all the owners of roads. Our responsibility—we have, you could call it, a monopoly when it comes to cars and drivers licences and the things concerning the drivers. But in Norway nowadays it is 12 different organisations: we own 10 000 kilometres of the road network, the counties own 44 000 kilometres of the road network, and the—this is a very difficult word for me—municipalities, or something, own 40 000 kilometres of the public road network. We at the Norwegian Public Roads Administration are put into several divisions. We have the building division. We have a maintenance division and of course RTS and HR divisions. The division I work for is called Transport and Society, and it is not really clear what our purpose is in Norway nowadays, but we are supposed to have the national responsibility at least for traffic safety in Norway. So it is me who should make the rules, the guidelines, concerning traffic safety that all the road owners should follow, and it is hopefully going to work. I am not sure yet because, as I told you, it is very new for us. It was much easier to understand our role in the old organisation—so far. Do you understand? Did it make sense?

**Mr GEPP:** Yes, it did. Thank you very much. Chair, if I might, just a quick follow-up question, a little bit divergent from the structural things. I am interested in your statistics and whether or not international visitors to Norway contribute to those statistics and how your country treats people visiting and their use of the roads?

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** Yes, we have them in our statistics, yes. There are foreigners in them: people from Sweden, Latvia or Poland. This is quite a hard field because we try to be fair in those statistics, but foreigners driving in Norway, do they have a higher risk than Norwegians driving in Norway? There are a lot of people from Eastern Europe, for example, who come to Norway to work. It is said that they do not have the same respect for alcohol limits as they have in Norway, for example, because with respect for alcohol limits, you do not drink and drive in Norway. The limit is 0.2, so that is almost nothing. It is just a limit because you should not be detected for drink driving when you did not really have anything to drink. But, yes, we include all foreigners in our statistics. We have numbers of what foreigners are driving in Norway, we have the accidents they are in, so, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Bernie Finn, our Deputy Chair, would you like to ask a question?

**Mr FINN:** I will indeed, Mr Chairman. Thank you very much indeed, and thank you, Sir, for joining us. We have it seems three things in common that contribute to the road toll: speed, drinking and drugs. I want to concentrate on the last one for the moment because we here in Victoria, in Melbourne, seem to have the first

two under control to a certain degree, but from what I have been hearing for the last few years, drug driving—people who have taken illicit drugs and then get behind the wheel of a car—are a growing danger to the rest of us on the roads. How have you coped with that problem? Indeed is it a problem in Norway, and how have you coped with that issue?

**Mr ENGBRETSEN:** This is a very hard issue to cope with. We are working with it, yes, because in Norway it seems like it is often a combination with alcohol and drugs as well, and we have limits for medicaments and drugs—how much can be in their blood. But the problem is this group of persons is very hard to reach. For example, people who drive multiple times with alcohol or drugs in their blood, we try to take their car from them, but the police fine them again and again, because they steal another car. We try to work with them, not only in our statistics. We have a lot of persons. That is why I told you this: we have reached a limit and it is very hard to get further down, because this group of persons are like on the side of the society, if I can say it that way. It is a very hard group to reach, it is a very hard group to target. We have some things that we have proposed for the politicians but they are not so very popular, because they are going to be re-elected and such. It is like alcohol meters in the cars, and drug meters are also possible. It is like ISA, intelligent speed adaptations and such things, because it seems like those people not only drive with a concentrate of drugs or alcohol in the blood but are speeding as well, that analysis shows. So it is quite hard, I think. We are struggling with this group, yes.

**Mr FINN:** Tell us a little bit more about the drug meters, because I have to say that I have not heard about them to this date. Are you pioneering those over there, or have they been around for some time? What is the situation with those?

**Mr ENGBRETSEN:** This is an experimental thing that the police are trying out. They are not very polite, you know. The Alcometers are polite, but the drug meters—they try to find the level of some drugs or medicaments in the blood by blowing tests. But it has not reached as far as it maybe sounded from me—not as well. These things do not come from Norway—mostly not, because we are quite a small country and we do not have all the resources in the world to put into finding solutions for those problems. But we are trying; we are working on it. As I told you, I think that if you could have an Alcometer in the car and you would not be able to start the car if you have alcohol in your blood, you would get rid of a lot of the people with drugs and medicaments as well, especially for Norway, because in Norway we know that the combination is very often in place.

**Mr FINN:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** I might pass on to Mr Tim Quilty, then Mr Barton.

**Mr QUILTY:** Thank you. I was also interested in the topic of the drug-driving regime. In Victoria we have a zero tolerance model. We only test people for the presence of drugs in the system, whereas in Norway you attempt to test for the level of impairment, in the same way that we do for alcohol. Why did you decide to test for impairment instead of presence, and how does that work?

**Mr ENGBRETSEN:** That you should really ask a politician about. It is always an uncertainty with such tests, you know. We do not want to take people that actually have done nothing wrong. That is one of the reasons you always have a limit. In Norway, for alcohol we wanted actually to have zero as the limit, but we understood that then we could take some persons out for drink driving that actually had done nothing wrong. It is the way with things in Norway—you are innocent, and it is our job to prove that you are not innocent, if you understand.

**Mr QUILTY:** I find that very interesting, and I think that is the direction that Victoria should be moving in. I understand that you have made adjustments to the system over the years. Have they been effective? What changes have you made and why have you made them?

**Mr ENGBRETSEN:** When it comes to alcohol, we have changed the limits, yes. We had .05 until five years ago or something, and now it is .02. That is close to nothing. Research shows that the people with a low concentration of alcohol in the blood have stopped. They do not drink at all when they are driving now—not a sip of alcohol. But the problem is the group with a high concentration. Reducing this limit has had no effect on those people, unfortunately. So I think for those persons you have to have other measures to cope with them. I am not sure what we are going to do with them. It is a very, very tough topic.

**Mr QUILTY:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Barton.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Chair. In the document we have got here it says that 13 per cent of all fatal road accidents in Norway in 2018 were caused by driver fatigue. Was that in the commercial sector? Was that truck drivers, or where would that be? What was the main component of that?

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** Could you repeat that? The sound was a bit unclear here to Norway. I did not hear the question. And you have more of an accent than the other person as well, so a little slower.

**Mr BARTON:** Sure, no problem. In 2018, your stats say, driver fatigue accounted for 13 per cent of all fatal accidents. Where was that being driven from? Was that coming from the commercial sector, like truck drivers, or what other sectors would be the main contributors to that?

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** Sorry again—‘driver fatigue’, what do you mean by that?

**Mr BARTON:** Drivers falling asleep at the wheel. That is how we sort of—

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** Yes, they fall asleep, they use the telephone, such things?

**Mr BARTON:** No, like a truck driver who had driven all night—we have got some strong rules about how our drivers should behave.

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** We have very strong regulations about truck drivers in Norway. The problem is— not a problem; it is a good thing for the truck drivers in Norway—that in the accidents that the truck drivers are already in, they are not the part that makes the accident. So they are often involved in accidents, but it is the car, the person in the car, and sometimes you can think that it is a suicide or something. But this topic you are talking about, we are trying to work on it. There has been a lot of thinking about driving, on a mobile phone, falling asleep and such. We have had a lot of head-on accidents where we suspect that the person has done something wrong, but it is very hard to find. We have some numbers, but I am not sure how polite they are, if you understand what I mean.

**Mr BARTON:** I will just ask one other little question there. One-third of all those killed on Norwegian roads either were not wearing a seatbelt or were not wearing a seatbelt properly. Is it a legal requirement, is it law, to have to wear a seatbelt and they are just not doing it?

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** You should always wear a seatbelt in Norway, even if you are just driving from the garage, 10 metres. And most people use seatbelts in Norway. As I said in the introduction, in 96 per cent of all vehicle kilometres in Norway people use seatbelts. This shows it is a little group that do not use seatbelts, but unfortunately that is the same group that is also speeding. So this is the group I am talking about—a group of people very hard to reach. How to say it? They are not very fond of following all the rules or something.

**Mr BARTON:** Yes. We have them here.

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** Yes, you do. The seatbelt is the cheapest life insurance you can give yourself, in my honest opinion.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Mr Engebretsen. It is so good of you to join us. In the end you have got this very small group of people that you are trying to stop from killing themselves, really. As an economist, what is the cost-benefit analysis of continuing to pursue strategies where you cannot save people from themselves, which adds to the cost burden to the rest of society? Do you keep on working to pursue a zero road toll—and you have done incredibly well—at what cost? That is the first question. Maybe deal with that.

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** I understand your question, yes. I am working with traffic safety, and though I am an economist I would say that it is quite important. But yes, we are using a cost-benefit analysis to find what we

should do in Norway regarding traffic safety. It can be negative, but we use it to sort. So if all the factors are negative, even though you can use money, spend money on doing things, the cost-benefit analysis for me is not an answer with too—what do you call it?—[inaudible]. And if the politicians have the willingness to pay for the things, then probably something is wrong with—not with the analysis, but the value we put on things. Because this is quite a big discussion worldwide, I know—the value of time, the value of life, the value of the environmental things and so on, but we are just proposing, and the politicians are saying if we are getting the money or not. So if they have a willingness to pay, then, okay, they are liking something in our analysis.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** And I just have a follow-up question, which is totally different. When you were working at trying to make Norwegians safer, did road surfaces and building come into the equation, as much as all the other factors? Did you have to re-examine how you built the roads themselves to make them safer—the surfaces, the repairing, the construction?

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** We have been working a lot with the roads. We have been working with the surfaces of course. In Norway the climate and the landscape make it that there are not that many surfaces or pavements we can use in Norway, but we are working a lot with the roads and especially in the guidelines for road building, how the roads are underneath, so we do not destroy them during the winter. And the width of the roads—you know, the shoulders of the road—this is an economical question. That is an interesting economical question—how wide should the shoulder be? You know, if you widen the shoulder, it is better for traffic safety, especially on motorways, but it costs a lot of money to widen the shoulder from 1.5 metres, for example, to 2 metres. And working with the friction, the surfaces—we have done a lot of things with the surfaces, yes. It is not enough actually, but we have done a lot. It could always be better, you know.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Sure. With your climate, you have done a lot better than we have, and we do not have the problems of your climate. Maybe we could learn what your strategies have been to make the surfaces better. Certainly the shoulders are a massive issue, especially in rural [Zoom dropout].

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Engebretsen, I just had one question, about the speed limits in Oslo—are they very low, and what is your top speed on the motorways? What is the speed limit in Oslo, in the city, and what is the speed limit on the motorways?

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** I will tell you about Norway. In Norway, in the urban areas, the speed limits are 50 kilometres an hour, and we use 30 and 40 in Oslo somewhere. In rural areas, the speed limit is 80 kilometres an hour. That is the rule, but when it is an especially dangerous road—so if we have a high accident frequency—we try to get it down to 70. The new motorways we are building have a maximum speed of 110 kilometres an hour. It looks like 110 kilometres an hour is a speed that the Norwegian population are quite happy with, because I have done some studies on speed in Norway and the average speed on 110-kilometre motorways is 103 kilometres an hour or so. So the average Norwegian is quite loyal to the speed limits, they are, but they have 50 and 80 general speeds.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Very similar to us here in Victoria. Our maximum is 110 and in many urban areas the speed limit is now about 50. I appreciate your input. If there are no other questions from the committee members, I wish to say thank you to Mr Engebretsen for his contribution. It has been very insightful. Thank you to the Norwegian Public Roads Administration for you giving your insight. There are a lot of similarities but a lot of differences too from our system, but I guess the results speak for themselves. You are doing something very well, so keep it up.

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** I think so. I think that you can still have some quite cheap measures, quite cheap things you can do that will make it safer in Victoria as well, because I think that 263 is too much for a state like Victoria, with 6.4 million inhabitants or something. Good luck.

**The CHAIR:** We are exploring all those options. Thank you again. It has been a pleasure.

**Mr ENGBRETSSEN:** Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**