

# **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

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

Melbourne—Tuesday, 6 October 2020

*(via videoconference)*

### **MEMBERS**

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Mr Mark Gepp

### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Dr Matthew Bach

Mr David Limbrick

Ms Melina Bath

Mr Andy Meddick

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr David Davis

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

**WITNESS**

Mr Rob McInerney, Chief Executive Officer, iRAP.

**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 acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. My name is Enver Erdogan, and I am Chair of the committee. I would also like to introduce my fellow committee members: Mr Bernie Finn, Mr Lee Tarlamis, Mrs Beverley McArthur, Mr Mark Gepp, Mr Rod Barton and Mr Andy Meddick. I wish to welcome any members of the public that are watching via the live broadcast.

To witnesses, all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide 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. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

We welcome any opening comments but ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to allow plenty of time for discussion. Could I please remind members and witnesses to ensure their microphones when not speaking are muted 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 name for the benefit of our Hansard team and then start your presentation. Thank you.

**Mr McINERNEY:** Robert David McInerney. Thank you, Chair, and to all the members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to address the inquiry today. As background, I am the Chief Executive Officer of the International Road Assessment Programme. It is a registered charity that has the vision for a world free of high-risk roads, and we work together in partnership with governments and NGOs in more than 100 countries all around the world. We work with the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Bank and others to reduce what is the biggest killer of young people worldwide—that is, road trauma. As such my focus is global, but we have some great and positive partnerships with all the key stakeholders there in Victoria. The program there is known as AusRAP, and in Victoria there are a range of existing partnerships with the Department of Transport, TAC, VicRoads, RACV, Transurban, local government, ARRB Group and Safe System Solutions. As a charity we provide all of our resources to all of these local partners to help save lives there in Victoria.

The most well known part of the RAP program is the star rating of roads, where 1-star is the least safe and 5-star is the safest, and there are star ratings for pedestrians, for cyclists, for motorcyclists and for vehicle occupants. Importantly—and you might have heard this from some of the other people contributing to the inquiry—when you are on a 1-star road, the level of death or injury might be up at this level. If you can bring it to 2-star, you can halve the level of death and injury; you can halve it again going to 3-star; and by the time you get to 4- and 5-star, you are approaching Vision Zero in terms of performance in road trauma reduction.

So as part of that the star rating is now being adopted as the global standard, as part of the United Nations sustainable development goals, but also as part of the global road safety performance standards that have been adopted by member states all around the world, including Australia. The two critical targets that relate to road infrastructure are target 3, that looks to make sure that all new roads are built to a minimum 3-star or better standard for all road users by 2030, and target 4, to progressively bring your existing roads up to the point where at least 75 per cent of travel is on 3-star or better roads for pedestrians, for cyclists, for motorcyclists and for vehicle occupants by 2030.

We have national targets already in place in Australia in this regard, and again we look for ambitious targets from Victoria in your next road safety strategy, but the main thing is the AusRAP program is there to help you measure and manage infrastructure safety performance to optimise the investment you spend on the roads with a focus on maximising lives saved. And in addition to the star rating that you may have heard of there is also crash mapping, there is investment optimisations, a star rating for schools programme, a star rating for designs tool for your new major projects and a whole range of other supporting tools. And linked to those you can set

simple policy targets. So you might be aiming for a Melbourne CBD that is 5-star for pedestrians and cyclists by 2030, likewise for the Mildura town centre. You want the Hume Highway to be 4- or 5-star standard by 2030. It is already there, and you had zero fatalities on the Hume Highway last year.

You might for the Alpine region be looking to do a combination of speed management and low-cost infrastructure upgrades to hit that 3-star-or-better standard, and then in relation to schools I would love my kids to have a 5-star journey to school, and I would love every kid to have that same journey. So AusRAP is there to help you progressively and systematically eliminate these high-risk roads by 2030, and it is simple, measurable and achievable. And importantly they can be celebrated. So as members of Parliament or as ministers you can actually go out alongside VicRoads and the TAC and local government and the RACV and ribbon-cut these brand-new 4- and 5-star roads as you open them, whether it is a village precinct or whether it is a major highway, because we need to celebrate safer roads, and the community needs to build a broader understanding that some roads are safer than others.

But importantly, I am really impressed that it is the Economy and Infrastructure Committee that is hosting this inquiry, because between now and 2030 around 100 000 Victorians will be killed or injured in road crashes. The cost to your economy will be \$50 billion, and you cannot afford to let that happen, so there is much more we can and must do. The majority of the deaths will be on rural roads, where Victorians, the majority of them, are travelling on these 1- and 2-star roads as vehicle occupants. The majority of the injuries are happening in the urban areas, intersections and where pedestrians and cyclists are still on 1- or 2-star roads—so again great opportunity for improvements.

Just in closing, really, I must highlight that the tragedy of the injury levels needs to be understood if you are going to respond on a scale that matters, and we have been doing great work with the TAC to really bring the spotlight onto these brain injuries and spinal injuries and internal injuries that are life changing for Victorians when they occur. That burden of the injury is deep within your health and social welfare systems, and it is why you have to act on a scale greater than you ever have before, because it is cost effective.

And if I can draw, just in closing, a comparison to COVID. Can you imagine if we responded to road trauma with the same sorts of aggressive and ambitious actions as we have with COVID-19? The one difference, though, when it comes to road safety, is it is not a trade-off between health and the economy. When you invest in road trauma reduction, you will save lives, you will save money and you will create jobs. It is a win-win-win, and I really look forward to exploring that with you all today. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr McInerney, for that introduction and presentation. I found it quite informative, especially with your global outlook as well. I might pass over to our Deputy Chair, Mr Bernie Finn, to ask the first question, and then to Mr Gepp to ask the second question.

**Mr FINN:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I do appreciate it, and Rob, thank you for your contribution to today's considerations. I represent an area that is a growing area of Melbourne, and that is Melbourne's west. One of the biggest problems that we have in the outer west is the number of roads that were built for something that they are not coping with or not catering for now. We have bridges, for example, that are 150 years old, which were horse-and-dray-type things back then but are now carrying B-double trucks and all manner of things. This is right throughout the outer west, and every day we wake up to more news of accidents, sometimes tragic accidents, in the outer west on some of these roads. How do we get these roads up to scratch? I have to say to you that the government has been, well, somewhat negligent in bringing forward solutions to the issues that we have in the outer west of Melbourne. How do we actually bring these roads up to scratch?

**Mr McINERNEY:** Thank you, Mr Finn. You have a very common problem with those what we call 'growing pains' as urban areas expand. Primarily one of the biggest problems you have got in road safety is that you had a predominantly rural road system that is now becoming an urban road system. With that you are not making the adjustments ahead of the development, and that is what is leaving behind residual death and injury on your network that does not have to happen if you get your planning right. To put it simply, you will have a high-speed undivided road with a 100-kilometre-an-hour limit. You will then have urban areas building along it, so suddenly all of your intersections are a lot busier than they have ever been before. But you wait until it becomes a blackspot before it is upgraded, as opposed to, 'We know that development's happening; we will put in the roundabouts and those safer intersection designs before the build-up'—not waiting for the body count to mount up before you are willing to act. It is actually very predictable, the level of death and injury you will

have on those roads. But likewise you will also have the vulnerable road user problems. You want your community members to be able to live life, to be out as pedestrians and cyclists, particularly as you are facing COVID. But these rural roads had no facilities for these vulnerable road users, and once again we retrofit them too late for many people who have lost their lives, who have been injured. But it is all part of planning, so if you were to plan that as part of the expansion in your areas you are making sure all of the new roads are 3-, 4- and 5-star for pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and vehicle occupants, you will keep pace ahead of the growth and you will stop that burden and death and injury on your community members.

**Mr FINN:** How do we get the bureaucracy to think like that? Quite often you have got to have half a dozen deaths under your belt before they will even think about improving a road. How do we get them to think the way that you have just proposed?

**Mr McINERNEY:** Yes, look, I think the main thing is transparency. A lot of bureaucrats, if I can say it politely, have nine fingers covering their backsides and one finger left being ambitious and doing the work, so transparency is very important. So, for example, if you had annual maps of the crashes on your network that were as accessible to politicians as they were to the decision-makers and the planners, you would have a very clear awareness that some roads are safer than others and where these problems are. Likewise, I think, if you bring in accountability for every road design and planning project that goes ahead—so, as an example, every new road and transport project in Victoria must report the predicted star rating of what they are about to build and the expected body count over the 20-year life of that facility—suddenly people would be accountable, because at the moment road safety does not have a pass mark, and you can bring that in, just as the United Nations has, by legislating it. All new roads must be 3-star or better for everyone—some of your really important corridors, 4- and 5-star. With that accountability and transparency you will drive the change, I hope, that you are looking for, and we are seeing that happening worldwide to great success.

**Mr FINN:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will pass over to Mr Gepp.

**Mr GEPP:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Mr McInerney, for your presentation this morning. I wonder whether iRAP has done any work in terms of costing—I think you have done some analysis on ratings of the different roads throughout Victoria—so whether or not you have done any costings in relation to bringing all roads up to a minimum 3-star standard, what that sort of cost would look like, what sort of time frame we are looking at and also what additional money would need to be available then for upkeep. I imagine, once you get a road to a certain standard, then you still actually have got to pour in money to maintain that. Number one.

My second question revolves around any research that is available—you quoted some statistics earlier; well, not a statistic, but you said that road trauma is the biggest global killer of young people—whether you have got examples of where these standards of roads have been lifted to the 3-star level and what that has done in terms of driver behaviour and whether there is any correlation between those things.

**Mr McINERNEY:** Yes, fantastic. Thanks, Mr Gepp. So in terms of your first question, there has certainly been some analysis on the economics behind the upgrades. What I would mention is that is being held by TAC and VicRoads, so that is certainly accessible information that you will be able to draw on. What we do within the models is to look to optimise the investment. We recognise governments have multiple priorities for their spend, but importantly you need to put that business case together for that investment. So we look to optimise that investment, maximising lives saved per dollar spent. So if you have got a fixed budget, you can optimise that spend across your network accordingly. If you want to look at what an ambitious target might be, like bringing all roads to 3-star, you can test that scenario. The important thing is that to get to 3-star or better you can either upgrade the infrastructure or reduce speeds—or a combination of both. So for the Hume Highway, for example: completely cost effective to bring that to 4- and 5-star standards, and you have. Some of the lower volume alpine roads need good line marking and signage, but probably bringing the speeds down to 80 becomes a more viable way to bring those to 3-star. So the key thing I would say is: it is affordable to set a target for this; it is just about that optimised trade-off between the infrastructure investments and the speed management end of this. Countries like Bangladesh and Kenya are able to achieve these targets, so I am sure Victoria can as well.

In terms of your second question, what do we see when these roads are upgraded? Generally a really great reaction from the community and, again, one that I would say is not celebrated enough by the governments and the elected leaders who are doing this. For example, the Bruce Highway in Queensland they took from 1- and 2-star up to 4- and 5-star standard. It led to an 83 per cent reduction in death and injury on that road—a fantastic outcome. If you look in the paper that I have provided, on page 5, you will see there the Anglesea road upgrade that you have done in Victoria as part of the SSRIP program funded by TAC and VicRoads. That is a fantastic example, where some pretty low cost things have taken that road from 2-star to 4-star. The community will have noticed the difference. They will not be scared driving along that road at daytime or at night-time or when a truck is coming towards them. They will feel that. But you perhaps have not even celebrated that enough, and that is where we are really encouraging you to engage with the public about, ‘Yes, Anglesea Road is now a 4-star road, and we’re really proud to have provided that to you as a community’.

But likewise, where you need some of the challenging discussions around speed, you can be saying, ‘Well, look, this is a 1-star road. We can’t afford to upgrade it. Can you come with us—come on a journey about what’s the speed that we’re willing to tolerate to bring the levels of death and injury down to something we can tolerate as a community?’. I think that is where you can really bring the community on the road with you, in the same way the star ratings of vehicles do it for our vehicle fleets—something you would be very familiar with. We can get that same familiarity around the infrastructure safety performance as well.

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

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you very much, Chair. And thank you for your presentation this morning. We just received a presentation prior to your coming onto the program this morning from a farmer who has been badly affected by wire rope barriers. Out here in my electorate, which covers 79 000 square kilometres, the road surfaces are basically mostly poor, road edges are a problem, we have got roadside vegetation totally out of control—some people see it as a wildlife corridor or a conservation zone instead of a safe place—and we have got wire rope barriers now as the solution. It seems to be the TAC’s solution to reducing road deaths, where in many instances they are creating more problems. We just heard that the installation near the farms in the Gheringhap area in my electorate that is not even completed—it is about six weeks old—has already had four incidents of crashing into it because it is, you know, hopelessly located and probably should not be there in the first place.

So what is your position on the quality of road surfaces and the proper building and maintenance of roads, the issue of roadside vegetation creating hazards, which then seem to encourage people to put barriers up so that you do not run into trees on the side of the road when they should not be there in the first place, and wire rope barriers? I have to tell you that people in country Victoria are a little sick of people in Melbourne telling us that we need to reduce our speed. ‘Reduce speed’ signs are now everywhere in country Victoria because the road needs fixing and so there are difficulties with the road surface. So we put up a ‘Reduce speed’ sign because of dangerous road surfaces. How do you respond to these issues?

**Mr McINERNEY:** Thanks, Mrs McArthur. I appreciate your question. Look, let me start with the maintenance and road condition issue, because I think that is a very important one. You are absolutely right. I grew up in country South Australia in a small rural town. We had horrendous roads to drive on, growing up as children. And actually I think the key thing that I would like to highlight is that often we maintain our worst roads the worst. By that what I mean is if you have got a lot of 1- and 2-star roads in your electorate—and if you are looking after a rural road network, that is very likely—what you will find is often the maintenance standards on those roads, whether it be for the edge condition, the shoulders, the signage, the line marking, are actually maintained the worst. So one thing we very much encourage is that if you cannot afford the big infrastructure upgrades on these roads, the little things about road condition and maintenance should be at the top of their game. There is no excuse for poor line marking and signage on any road. It is like your shopfront window in terms of looking after roads. If you let those conditions go down, then you are asking for problems. You have already got a very unforgiving road that has been made even worse by having a poor maintenance regime and poor maintenance of those critical low-cost features. So that is the starting point.

In terms of your question around barriers and when you said it has been struck four times, I am really glad to hear that, because that possibly means four lives have been saved. There is absolutely no doubt—in all the experience worldwide and from agencies we have seen install the wire rope barriers—that they are a lifesaver. In many cases you will not even know the vehicle owner who hit the barrier, because they drive home to their

family and talk about a close miss and ‘boy that was scary’, rather than having their family or a policeman knock on their door or be in the TAC claim system for the next 20 years with a head injury or spinal injury. So perhaps those four strikes you have already pointed to are lives saved.

Every time you see a wire rope barrier with a brand-new post in there, please look at that as being a life saved, because it has. The one big thing with those barriers, particularly the wire rope barriers, is the severity outcome when people strike them is so light that often people are not even injured at all, even at high speeds. So it is absolutely an important and viable solution to consider in every location in these high-speed rural areas.

Your question about the rate of—

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Can I just interrupt? Sorry, can I just interrupt? These of course are not high-speed rural areas. These barriers are so close their distance is not viable for farmers taking their machinery down the roads. They cannot help but hit them because there is, I think, 5.1 metres distance between the posts and the wire rope barriers and the machinery is at least 5 metres wide. So this is just an impost to productive activity in rural Victoria. This is not saving lives. This is actually costing money to farmers in having their machinery damaged.

**Mr McINERNEY:** For sure. So I think it is really important, Mrs McArthur, to separate the two discussions. It is not very efficient going to a funeral of your mate who hit a tree. That is time and energy and lost productivity that every rural community cannot tolerate. I lost friends growing up in a small country town who hit a tree on a high-speed rural road. So it is important that we separate those two discussions. I think what you are looking at is you have got a very, very viable road safety intervention that definitely save lives and does without doubt. What you have then got to consider is perhaps the planning and the design mechanisms by which they put them in are not taking into account that 5.1-metre farmers’ machinery, and the design and planning teams can perhaps do a better job of making sure they look after all the community needs in that environment to keep those other essential parts of the economy going, to keep access to properties open and all of those. But what I would do is say that that is an access and a community engagement issue, and it is very important that we do recognise that lives are being saved and being saved on a fairly grand scale with these sort of treatments around the world.

The trade-off between keeping trees and protecting them is something that governments have to grapple with. That is perhaps a bigger one that again can be dealt with at a community level when you are looking at ‘Do I protect the hazards or do I remove them?’ and ‘How do I keep access for the farms and the important economy-producing members of the community who need access to do their daily jobs?’, just as your previous farmer has highlighted. So I think again: separate the safety from access, and I think that will keep the discussion productive in the right area and hopefully come up with better ways to install and better ways to choose when and where these types of barriers are installed in the future.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Given that we are spending about half a billion dollars on wire rope barriers, surely there has got to be a cost-benefit analysis as to whether that is the best way to spend money to make roads safer—or is it better to fix the roads in the first place and fix the environment surrounding the roads so that that is safer? But just carte blanche rolling out wire rope barriers—and I know in parts of England they are all being pulled out—you have to look at exactly why we have got this obsession with installing wire rope barriers as the solution to saving lives.

**Mr McINERNEY:** Look, I think the reason we do have them and you are seeing them in more places is that they work. The optimisation that I talked about earlier on is about working out where they are cost effective. So absolutely, there will be some roads where it is more cost effective to remove the hazards, in others it is about protecting the hazards and in other locations it may be about some speed management. The question comes down to: how many people are you willing to have die on the road and can we justify a safe workplace for all Victorians when they are driving down roads with dangerous roadsides or in poor condition?

I am with you—it is absolutely about it being the combination of treatments at a location, whether that is rumble strips and sealed shoulders and protecting the trees, whether it is looking at wider sealed shoulders or whether it is about barriers. I think the key thing is there are a range of solutions and you can optimise them. What we do with our RAP programs is help governments understand the economic return on investment for every one of those and help them make better and optimised decisions for the future that will save lives and will be economically viable.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I am just acutely aware of time. Mr Barton, if you have a question, I will allow one question. If not, Rob, if you are happy, we could email you any supplementary questions we may have, if that is okay.

**Mr McINERNEY:** Absolutely, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Barton, if you have got a short question.

**Mr BARTON:** One question—thank you. We will do the other one by writing to Rob. Rob, I am just wondering: do you know off the top of your head how many of our roads in Victoria are 3-star or less? Is it 40 per cent, 50 per cent, 70 per cent?

**Mr McINERNEY:** Yes, that is right. I know that 23 000 kilometres of your state-controlled roads have been assessed. That was done in 2015. I am just having a quick look if I can get the exact numbers for you. That survey was done in 2015. My memory is around 30 to 35 per cent is still in that 1- or 2-star category. I do know that 85 per cent of the roads we assessed still have dangerous roadsides; 80 per cent-plus are still on high-speed, undivided roads. That data is available, and certainly TAC and/or VicRoads would be able to make sure you can see where the network was in 2015. Obviously they are doing some of these before and after analyses, like the Anglesea Road, which I provided in the paper to give to you. So you are well on the way to the 2030 global target, and you should be able to well and truly surpass that by 2030 with the current investments that you are putting in.

**Mr BARTON:** Thanks, Rob.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Rob. It is great to hear that we are on the right track. Obviously due to time on behalf of the committee I would like to thank you for your submission and presentation. I wish to thank you and also iRAP, because it was very informative. I enjoyed reading your submission. You have provided a bit of a different outlook to some of our other speakers today, so I appreciate that. On behalf of the committee I just wish to say thank you again.

**Mr McINERNEY:** Excellent. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, all committee members, and all the best with your life-saving work. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**