

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Increase in Victoria's Road Toll

Melbourne—Tuesday, 21 July 2020

(via videoconference/teleconference)

MEMBERS

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Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr David Davis

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

WITNESS

Ms Lisa Skaife, Founder and CEO, Driveschool Enterprises.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Increase in Victoria's Road Toll. We welcome any members of the public that are watching via the live broadcast.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. However, any comment you make outside may not be protected. Any deliberately false or misleading information 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 request that they please be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to allow for time for discussion. Could you please state your name for the benefit of the Hansard team and then begin your presentation, thank you. Over to you, Lisa.

Ms SKAIFE: Good morning. I am Lisa Skaife, and thank you very much for the opportunity to present this morning. I am the founder and CEO of Driveschool Enterprises. I have worked in professional motorsport for over 25 years, was involved in a road trauma fatality when I was 22 and have spent the last eight years researching and developing a program to help address the overrepresentation of teenagers in our road toll. We have collaborated with experts in driver training, simulation, gaming, artificial intelligence, education and road safety to create a program that is both educational and engaging for the target market. In our submission we offered a broad overview of our findings and recommendations in our specific areas of expertise, which address points (2), (4) and (7) in the terms of reference. Whilst using the *Towards Zero* road safety strategy as a core point of reference, we believe that more focus needs to be on safer users—in terms of not just cyclists and pedestrians but actual drivers. It is our belief that with the use of technology, improvements in driver competency and in-car behaviours such as mobile phone usage, drug and alcohol impairment, hazard perception and fatigue management can be addressed in a safe and controlled environment.

I would like to share with you a short presentation outlining our recommendations, and I would welcome any questions after we have done that.

Visual presentation.

Ms SKAIFE: Our mission is to develop cost-effective and proven training techniques that will bridge the gap between theory and practical driver training, engage and educate future road users with innovation and reduce the incidence of road trauma. This platform has the capacity to teach people firsthand about hazards, distractions and impairments in a language they all relate to—digital.

We have all seen this graph before showing fatality rates versus years of driving, which clearly demonstrates what we are doing is not working. Over the past six years in Victoria fatality rates have decreased by 12 per cent but serious injury has increased by 38 per cent. Despite the fact that teenagers have an underdeveloped frontal lobe, their reaction times, reflexes and coordination skills are at their peak. On average most learners get between six and 10 professional lessons, and the remainder are done primarily with their parents, who have acquired 20 to 30 years of bad habits. The current training procedures are both antiquated and inadequate.

Approximately 90 per cent of all fatalities are caused by driver error, yet in the past 50 years every aspect of road safety has been changed and modified except for the way we actually teach people how to drive. Our cars are safer, with ABS, traction control, airbags et cetera; our roads, our policing and infrastructure are all above average; and our medical intervention is world class. Our training and testing procedures are not.

Our solution is a combination of simulation, gaming and artificial intelligence. It is effective and safe, and the students love it. Here are some shots of the program in school classrooms and on event. The stage 1 program was launched at the 2019 Australian grand prix and has been played by over 5000 users. It won the 2019 Australasian serious games congress, with the highest score in the history of the event. And we have conducted

a blind randomised test using a Melbourne University protocol whereby our students were rated 48 per cent more competent and 17 per cent less anxious after completing our program. The MyDRIVESCHOOL program takes between 45 and 60 minutes to complete and is aligned with the school curriculum in years 9 to 11.

Stage 1 of the program covers basic in-cabin cognitive skills, such as steering, acceleration, putting blinkers on, intersections, traffic and emergency braking. The stage 2 program, which is currently in development, focuses on driver distraction, such as mobile phones, drug and alcohol impairment, country and rural driving scenarios, hazard awareness and fatigue management. Funding pending, this program is scheduled to be launched at the 2021 Australian grand prix. All our programs can be repurposed as an assistive technology for people with a variety of different special needs to give them choice, independence and control.

COVID has killed over half a million people this year; road trauma kills 1.35 million people every year. But what the pandemic has taught us is that online works. It is effective, time and cost efficient and safe—all the reasons why we developed MyDRIVESCHOOL. We want people to be able to make their mistakes online, not on road.

This program has been described as potentially the best road safety development since the three-point safety belt. Forty-seven years ago Victoria were the first jurisdiction in the world to mandate the compulsory wearing of the three-point safety belt, and we were classed as world leaders. We can use this opportunity to be leaders again and bring driver training into the 21st century.

That is the end of our formal presentation. Now I would love to have any questions from the committee.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Lisa. I might actually start with one question, and then we will go around the committee. My question was about the online simulation that you just showed. What equipment do you need to actually undertake that? It looked like there was a PlayStation sign on it.

Ms SKAIFE: The program is delivered on PC, so on the students' own devices—90 per cent of people have a PC—and in conjunction with a Logitech steering wheel, which is a portable steering wheel and pedal set.

Mr FINN: Lisa, thank you for that extensive coverage of what I think is a very, very good idea. But I am very keen to know how this would impact one section of the driving community that I think is perhaps more dangerous than most, and that is young males. It is my experience, certainly out my way, that if you see a young man in a baseball cap behind the wheel of a Commodore or a ute you have got major problems on your hands. I am just wondering how this program would deal with a certain mindset, because it seems to me that, far from artificial intelligence, a lot of these kids actually have no intelligence at all and perform extraordinary feats, if I can call them that, and many of them have ended tragically. I recall one where one guy in a ute crashed off the Whitten Bridge a couple of years ago. He took his girlfriend with him, and they both died in a fiery ball at the bottom of the bridge. So how would this program impact that mindset and those people with that sort of mindset?

Ms SKAIFE: For our program there is a series of graduated pass-fail exercises. So every exercise they have got to pass. If they speed, they fail; if they do not put their blinkers on, they fail. There is a series of areas in the program where they have actually got to conduct themselves appropriately in order to get to the next stage of the program, so it does actually teach them that speeding is not appropriate and not putting your blinkers on. All the road rules are incorporated into the program.

Mr FINN: Well, if you could break that cycle, that would be an excellent thing. If indeed this will work, you have got my full support.

Ms SKAIFE: Thank you.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you, Lisa, for that. I have just got two questions. The first one comes to the fact that you are saying that the estimate is that providing the simulation game to all public secondary schools would cost around \$5.5 million annually. What do you estimate the savings would be to our health system, for instance, in road trauma or the insurance industry through having repairs to cars et cetera? There is surely going to be an offset for that \$5.5 million; yes? And then the other thing is: just quickly, can you just elucidate a little bit more on the training approaches of Sweden and the United Kingdom?

Ms SKAIFE: Okay. The training approaches of Sweden and the United Kingdom, they have a lot more professional driver training and they also have a lot more testing involved. So rather than just theory tests they have a lot of practical tests, and that is why they are some of the best jurisdictions in the world. That is where I think we suffer predominantly. In terms of the financial benefits, for one person to become a quadriplegic from a road accident costs \$5 million. We know we can improve road trauma statistics with this sort of program. Last year alone in Victoria 30 people died between the ages of 16 and 20—that is 30 teenagers dead. We know we can make a difference with this.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you so much. I must apologise, because I did kind of know what that was. I just was really trying to play devil's advocate there. I just wanted to tease that out so it was on the record. Thanks.

Ms SKAIFE: No problem.

The CHAIR: Great question and great answer.

Mr QUILTY: First up, just quickly, what is the cost of the steering kit and pedal thing?

Ms SKAIFE: The steering kit and pedals retail at \$500. We run programs whereby we go into schools and we supply every student in the room a steering wheel and pedal set, so they are all getting an hour's worth of simulation training at the same time.

Mr QUILTY: All right. In your submission you are saying that we have not reduced the accident rate at all in crashes but reduced the fatality rate, and that has been done with safer cars, effectively. So do you suggest that most of the money we have spent on road safety and most of our safety rules have been a waste of time?

Ms SKAIFE: No, I am not saying they have been a waste of time at all. What I am saying is that I do not believe they actually focus on the driver as much as what I believe they need to. When we know that driver error is the main cause of accidents, we are not actually looking at the core problem as opposed to the end result. Our program is specifically designed to increase competency of drivers before they get into the car, and I genuinely do not believe anybody should have to get in the car with somebody who has read a book and then they are expected to be able to drive a car. This program bridges the gap between theory and practical driver training.

Mr QUILTY: Do you think if we implemented your program everywhere we would be able to cut down spending in other areas?

Ms SKAIFE: Yes, because I believe the financial benefits of reducing the road toll and serious injuries would definitely more than cover the cost of the program.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Lisa. That was a great presentation. I am a massive believer in training in the schools and getting the kids to get that first stage so it is not such a huge thing when you turn 18: 'I've gotta get my licence, I've got to get out on the roads and by the way I can also go drink as well'—which I find staggering, that we do the two things at the same time. Could you tell me how long the program actually runs through the school period, for those who have not seen your submission?

Ms SKAIFE: You can actually finish the program in between 45 and 60 minutes, and we designed the program like that so it would not be a burden on the curriculum; it could actually be done in one period. However, every user gets a licence for 12 months, and because of the amount of artificial intelligence in the program, every play is different. Each time they get on and do the same exercises, but all the traffic integration in the program is different, so they remain engaged and they can play it as many times as what they would like.

Mr BARTON: You had some data in your submission that for kids that have done the course and those who have gone straight into a car there was a benefit—

Ms SKAIFE: We conducted a blind, randomised test at a METEC driver training facility where we got groups of students and half of them did Driveschool first and the other half got straight in the car and did the TAC Road Smart 20-minute lesson. The instructors had to judge and rate all the students without knowing who had done what first, and our students came out 48 per cent more competent and 17 per cent less anxious.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you, Lisa, for your submission and for talking to us today. I was just interested: how many schools have participated in this program so far?

Ms SKAIFE: Last year we got into about 15 schools. Our hero school was Haileybury, who trialled the program with 85 students, and this year they booked for 300, citing that it was one of the most popular programs that they had ever run. But unfortunately, like many schools, they have had to cancel their courses for this year.

Mr TARLAMIS: Do you also provide the training outside of schools in other forums or to other cohorts?

Ms SKAIFE: We would be happy to do that, but the program is very autonomous once people have the hardware. We are looking at councils, libraries and what have you for people to be able to have the hardware. Anybody can buy the program online right now and use it in their own lounge room, use it in community centres or anywhere appropriate for young drivers or future road users.

Mr TARLAMIS: And it could be adaptable to different settings in different communities, so language based as well—

Ms SKAIFE: Absolutely.

Mr TARLAMIS: Fantastic.

Mrs McARTHUR: I think this looks very exciting, and I can say that my children—or two of them—went through a public school in Warrnambool. There was a driver training course at the school, and if you reached the age where you could start learning to drive, you were taught on the school grounds, and it had all the various things like lights and railway crossings et cetera et cetera. It was a fantastic idea, I thought, that concept. I would be totally supportive of such a program being introduced into schools. I think there are many things that schools seem to do now, and this would seem to be an absolutely essential one. Some of them I would not think are so essential, but this would be absolutely essential.

But also, Lisa, we have got a problem in our electorate, the Western Victoria Region of Victoria, where we have the Great Ocean Road and we have large numbers of international drivers who, of course, make up 20 per cent of the accidents where ambulances are called. That does not account for the ones where ambulances are not called. So how do you think we could transfer this program to international drivers who get in a car sometimes straight off an aeroplane with no idea of Australian road rules and hire a car at an airport and head off down the Great Ocean Road, which is a threatening obstacle even if you are a half-decent driver, let alone somebody that has never driven on a divided road before? So how could we move this into being a requirement for hiring a car in Australia for international drivers?

Ms SKAIFE: That is an absolutely brilliant point. The program can definitely be made compulsory in all hiring premises. The year before last when we went to America, when you first get on the other side of the road it is actually a little bit daunting. Whereas this program would be ideal to be able to show somebody—within 15–20 minutes they could do a couple of exercises to demonstrate and allow them a little bit of practice before they actually get on a real road—our road rules, what side of the road we are driving on, driving in a left-hand drive car rather than a right-hand drive car. It would be ideal.

Mrs McARTHUR: We have spent half a billion and counting on wire rope barriers. If your program costs—what did you say?—\$5 million to roll out, it seems to me like a far better use of taxpayer money than more wire rope barriers. I would like to see if we could transfer this also into the international driving scenario, but it sounds like a very good program to be put into schools and actually made compulsory before anybody gets to go and do a road test. So thank you.

Ms SKAIFE: Thanks very much, Bev.

Mr GEPP: To our last witness we were spending too much money, Mrs McArthur, and now we are not spending enough, but anyway.

Mrs McARTHUR: We will cut it out from somewhere else, Mr Gepp. Oh, yes, we will.

Mr GEPP: We are nothing if not flexible and adaptable in this committee.

Mrs McARTHUR: It is about priorities, Mr Gepp.

Mr GEPP: Lisa, thank you so much for that presentation. The passion that you have for this is very, very obvious, and I do agree with the other speakers that it is quite exciting, this technology. You partly answered my question in terms of: schools can purchase the software and the consoles themselves. If you wanted to put it into any school tomorrow, they could use it effectively and get similar results to what you are getting—question one. And question two: have you done any research on kids who return to the program on multiple occasions and whether or not their experience through their online learning enhances their ability once they do actually drive?

Ms SKAIFE: Not specifically in that area. That is why we actually conducted the blind, randomised test—to demonstrate what benefits the program can provide for pre- and early-stage learner drivers, and we were very happy with the result it did give us. We believe that it should be compulsory in all schools and compulsory for every learner driver before they get in the car. We did a case study whereby in 2016, 264 people aged between 17 and 25 died on our roads and 23 drowned, yet we have seven years of compulsory swimming lessons in primary schools and we do not have any driver training in high schools. This is where we can really genuinely make a difference to the competency rates and give them a life skill with a duty of care within our secondary school community.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that, Lisa. I know that the adoption of technology has clearly taken the interest of this inquiry and its committee members, so we really appreciate your contribution. I really enjoyed the presentation and your submission also. It was a different angle from some of the other submissions we have had, so thank you very much for your contribution on behalf of the whole committee.

Ms SKAIFE: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Witness withdrew.