

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Increase in Victoria's Road Toll

Melbourne—Tuesday, 7 July 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

WITNESSES

Mr Peter Kartsidimas, Senior Manager, Transport, Planning and Infrastructure, and

Ms Elvira Lazar, Manager, Safety and Education, RACV.

The CHAIR: I declare open 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 our live broadcast.

Before I begin I will read a short witness statement. 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 you provide during the 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 I ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to allow time for discussion. Could I please remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise interference. If you have any technical difficulties, please disconnect and contact the committee staff using the contacts you were provided. Could you please give your name for the benefit of our Hansard team and then begin your presentation. Thank you. Over to you, Peter and Elvira.

Ms LAZAR: Good morning. My name is Elvira Lazar, and I am joined by Peter Kartsidimas. The RACV is grateful for the opportunity to provide further comment on our submission to address the increase in Victoria's road toll. Since more than 1000 people lost their lives in 1970, there has been significant progress to address road trauma. Many initiatives have had an impact, and we recognise that government leadership around legislation, enforcement and infrastructure has been key to the reductions in the number of lives lost.

Victoria has led the way with mandating safety technologies when registering new vehicles, random breath testing and seatbelt legislation. Sadly, 50 years since seatbelt laws were introduced around 20 people each year still die because they have not worn their seatbelt. Government subscribes to the safe system approach and has vision to get us closer towards zero, but the number of people that lost their lives in Victoria last year is a stark reminder that urgent and significant change across the system is needed. The recommended actions are known and are detailed in past strategies, but there must be political will to accelerate the adoption of these recommendations at all levels of government. They need to make tough decisions that will have an immediate impact on saving lives.

In terms of safe people, the human body is not designed to absorb the high forces involved in road crashes, and every opportunity should be taken to make the system safe outright. People make mistakes, and the safe system approach recognises that error on the road should not result in loss of life or serious injury. Our most inexperienced and vulnerable road users need to be protected.

Public education campaigns play a role in changing community attitudes to bring about positive behaviour change. Areas of focus include distraction, impairment—including drugs, medications and alcohol—seatbelt use and speed. To complement these campaigns deterrence through roadside testing all mobile units plays an important role. RACV supports the rollout of enforcement technology to assist with the detection of high-risk behaviours such as unlicensed driving, mobile phone use and not wearing seat belts. The role of technology in enforcement has been established in New South Wales and should be adopted as quickly as possible in Victoria.

In terms of safe vehicles, vehicles older than 10 years are associated with more than half the fatalities and serious injuries in Victoria. In order to improve vehicle safety, initiatives including tax incentives are needed to get safer cars on our roads. Since many safety features are now available on entry-level vehicles, manufacturers can be required to only import vehicles that meet the most stringent safety requirements. The Victorian government has mandated technology ahead of the national requirement previously, and there is an opportunity to lead again.

In terms of safe roads, most crashes on Victorian roads occur when someone makes a mistake, but the design of the road can make sure that does not end in death. The current standard of many Victorian roads is inadequate, and current road designs do not sufficiently prevent death and serious injuries. High-speed roads record 38 per cent of fatalities and pose the most risk when compared to other parts of the network. RACV has called for a minimum 3-star safety standard on existing major highways and of no less of then 4 stars on new sections of highway.

In terms of speed limits, RACV estimates that upgrading over 180 000 kilometres of 100-kilometre regional roads in Victoria to a 3-star safety standard would take around 1000 years at the current level of funding. Even if funding was doubled, this timeline is not acceptable. Just because a road has always had a certain speed limit does not mean that it is a safe speed. Speed is not always the cause of the crash, but the speed a vehicle is travelling at the point of impact will always affect how severely people are injured. Therefore RACV calls for an urgent review of speed limits on country and outer urban roads, prioritising roads where crashes are most likely to occur. This needs to be supported by strong community campaigns and education to ensure drivers understand these changes and obey them.

In terms of leadership and coordination, local governments are the most direct link to the community and are vital in embedding road safety initiatives at the community level. They require more resourcing and to be empowered to deliver road safety plans. To compound these issues, previous strategy recommendations often have not provided clear, quantifiable measures of success. A nationally integrated data collection system is needed to support strategies. We cannot manage what we cannot measure, and success is not achievable without good data.

In closing, if we examine the work needed to bring down the road toll, it can seem overwhelming and the concept of *Towards Zero* seems so far away. There are, however, known solutions, and we encourage government to lead successful interventions, as they have done in the past, by making some hard but necessary decisions to reduce the number of people killed and injured on Victorian roads. There is enormous opportunity to target areas in the next road safety strategy, to place greater emphasis on a safe system with clear KPIs, budgets and time frames to create a safe road system in Victoria. Many of these measures can be implemented quickly. And given Victoria has led the world with many aspects of road safety, with goodwill and a courageous, firm commitment we can make an immediate impact on bringing down Victoria's road toll. We thank the committee for the opportunity to present at this hearing, and we welcome your questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Elvira, for your contribution and to the RACV and Peter. I would like to pass around to all the committee members and give everyone an opportunity to ask questions. I am happy to allow preambles, but please ask a question. Who wants to go first? I might just kick off. I also want to acknowledge that Mr Andy Meddick has also come online. He is a participating member of this committee. Mr Tim Quilty, would you like to go first?

Mr QUILTY: You are advocating for lower speed limits on country roads. That is not something that I am necessarily a fan of. I wonder: have you got buy-in in the regional communities? It seems to me a lot of these descriptions come from people in the city for roads in the city who are not even paying attention to how we live in the country. Every time you lower a speed limit on the country roads you are turning off economic and community lights in country areas. I think people in the country have a slightly higher tolerance for deaths on the road in exchange for being able to continue living in our communities, not having to be squeezed off and everyone pushed into Melbourne. The question in that: do you think there are any situations where speed limits should rise—for example, on highways like the Hume Highway or a good, well-built highway—or do you think every speed limit should drop?

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: RACV does not believe in blanket speed limits. RACV believes in reviewing the speed limits on each road and adjusting them accordingly. So at the lower end there are a lot of regional roads where it is difficult at the moment to even travel at 100 kilometres per hour. They are unsafe, they do not have a lot of cars on them. And those roads are over-represented in the crash stats. Through our own market research we have identified through our ongoing work in regional Victoria—and I go out there quite often and talk to the locals as well about some of these issues—it is very clear that there are locations in regional Victoria where many locals believe that speed limits should be reduced, particularly on those, what I will call, lower order roads: not highly used, often do not have shoulders, trees are up beside the road and very difficult to take the corners at 100 kilometres per hour.

Equally, there are a lot of roads—your M roads and your A roads, your state highways—where we want to encourage people to drive on those roads at the high speeds of 100 or, if need be, if the quality is high enough and it is a 5-star road, 110 kilometres per hour. We believe that those roads should be the focus of any upgrades. What that would actually do is two things: if we spend our money and efforts on those roads, it will mean you can travel safer on them; it will also mean it would encourage people to use those roads rather than those lower order roads where they are not as safe. So if we can get people travelling on those high-speed, good-quality roads rather than those lower order roads which are not as safe, they will get there quicker and safer.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you for your presentation. I am interested that you say we need to do a lot more work fixing our roads. We would all agree with that. But this government has actually spent multi-millions of dollars in putting wire rope barriers on roads, and the recent Auditor-General's report has been scathing about this project. We will be looking into that later with some other presenters in an ongoing way. But do you think we should have fixed the roads first before we embarked on the wire rope barrier rollout? And in relation to country roads and rural roads—and I am inclined to agree with my colleague Mr Quilty that country users who use these roads are severely disadvantaged if you lower the speed limits even further just because the roads are not safe—we are constantly seeing reduced road limits because the roads are not fixed. I certainly went on a tour the other day of some roads in our area where the roadside vegetation is up against the road and they are unsafe. Governments, through local government or state government agencies, seem to be reluctant to make the roads safe on the roadside areas because of all the environmental issues. My question really is: should we fix all the roads, roadsides and conditions before we spend any more money on wire rope barriers?

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: What we do know is that we have got 180 000 kilometres in Victoria of 100-kilometre-per-hour roads and above. In an ideal world each and every kilometre would be at a 3- to 5-star standard, allowing everyone to drive on those roads as safely as possible. However, the amount of expenditure to do that and the amount of time to do that will take several years. We have estimated 1000 years. Even if it is 100 years, 50 years, 20 years, it is a very long time and you mentioned some of the environmental issues. We do not think it is appropriate that people unnecessarily die on our roads whilst we wait for these roads to be upgraded. Do we want them all to be upgraded and money spent on them? Absolutely, 100 per cent. We would encourage government to spend as much money as humanly possible— [Zoom dropout]

Are you there? Did you lose us? We are back.

The CHAIR: We lost you for about 2 minutes there so if you could just go back a little bit.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: I will state that again. As I was stating earlier, there is 180 000 kilometres of roads of 100-kilometre-per-hour speed limits and we would love to see each and every kilometre of road upgraded to—

Can you hear me?

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: Sorry. The wonders of modern technology. We would love to see all those roads upgraded, but we know it is going to take several years for that to occur and a lot of pain. Rather than people unnecessarily dying on our roads, we need to put in place measures to keep people safe. If that is road safety barriers in the first instance, we overall support road safety barriers. They do need to be implemented properly in the right places. However, we do know they save lives, and we would encourage government to continue rolling those measures out across the network wherever possible to save people's lives. Are you there?

Mrs McARTHUR: Enver, you might need to go to the next questioner.

Mr MEDDICK: I have got a feeling we might have lost the Chair, so—

The CHAIR: I am not—can you hear me?

Mr MEDDICK: We can now, mate, yes.

The CHAIR: This is the Parliament of Victoria's internet system I am on. My apologies.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank God for the NBN that we love so much.

Mrs McARTHUR: No wonder the roads do not work.

The CHAIR: I will pass back over to Peter and Elvira. My apologies about that.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: That is okay.

Ms LAZAR: Did Peter's response come through clearly or do we need to restate that response?

The CHAIR: I missed it all. If you could please restate it, that would be appreciated.

Mrs McARTHUR: I heard it all.

The CHAIR: Okay. If everyone else heard it, okay. I might just go over to Andy actually, so I will move on to the next question.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you both for presenting today and for your submission. Look, a little bit of a preamble: I also am in a rural electorate—I am in Western Victoria, just like Mrs McArthur—and have cause to travel a fairly extensive different type of road network in comparison to those who might be in metro Melbourne, for instance, where everything is quite contained. Very quickly you can move from very well maintained or recently upgraded highway situations to roads where just one left-hand turn off that highway can mean you have a single strip of bitumen and very large sections of sometimes graded, sometimes not, dirt on either side that have nothing else there. Yet some of those roads are still 100 kilometres an hour, and often because they are back roads per se many people travel well in excess of that, and that sometimes is what we find causes fatalities.

One of the other things that also tends to get a bit lost in that and is a particular interest to me is do you have any specific figures on those rural roads on the comparison of the speed limit versus animal strike and how many people are severely injured or killed because of that animal strike, and would you be advocates for speed reductions on those roads because of that if you analyse that data and find a correlation, and do you bear in mind any other methods that might be part of a suite of measures?

I am interested in trying to reduce the road toll on these back roads, and I see it as a combination of a reduction in the speed limit on those back roads, because, as you state, in an ideal world, they will not be like that. They will be incredibly well made. They will have lanes on either side with curb and guttering and it will all be marvellous, but we are a long way away from that. I kind of see it as a combination of factors: a reduction in the speed limit on those roads and then other things such as—

You would have perhaps heard of virtual fencing. Is that a scenario to assist in the reduction of road strike? Is that something that you would consider and would advocate for?

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: There is a lot in that. We have done some market research, and what that actually shows is that whilst a lot of people do not like to see the speed limit on those roads reduced, a lot of people do not even know that those unsealed roads are 100 kilometres an hour. What the market research also showed, importantly, was that when you explain the Safe System to people—and this is regional people; it is not city folk—when you explain to them why the speed should be reduced, they are more open to that reduction, so engagement with the community on these issues is really important.

We do not advocate for blanket speed limit reductions, but what we say is: look at each road on its merits and see what you can do from both an improvement perspective to make it as safe as possible physically as well as look honestly at that speed limit and ask yourself, 'Is this the appropriate speed limit?'. There are guidelines there that tell us what the appropriate speed limits are, and let us make it as safe as possible. There are often environmental issues and so forth that make it difficult to clear trees and so forth.

With regard to the data on animals being struck, we actually get a lot of correspondence from our members on this and quite recently a fair few have come through from places like Phillip Island, and people are very passionate about that. We do not hold that data ourselves, but it is all part of the system. I know myself, I struck a kangaroo at 110 kilometres an hour on a regional road and I was very lucky, but the stories you hear after that incident send a shiver down your spine. So it is something we need to look at, and it is not just the human impact. It is the impact on our animals, and that is something collectively as a whole system that needs to be looked at on a road-by-road basis to try to reduce the amount of incidents that occur.

I am not across virtual fencing, but anything we can do to improve our roads, make them safer should all be looked at.

Mr MEDDICK: Fantastic. And just one last question then, in terms of reducing the speed limits on these roads or increasing them, whichever you see as fit—because I agree, I think a blanket approach just does not work. It does not take into account individual conditions on individual roads—whose responsibility do you see it as to be setting that speed limit or the primary responsibility? As a local council in that area, they would be far more across I think the conditions of their roads than a centralised VicRoads office would be, for instance. Do you think that they should be able to make those decisions for themselves in saying, ‘Well, conditions have deteriorated on that road dramatically over the last three months, we do not have any program or funding in place to fix that over the next three. Therefore we are taking responsibility to reduce that road down to 60 or to 80 or whatever it might be’. Do you see that lies with them or with VicRoads completely?

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: I think VicRoads or the Department of Transport needs to set good guidelines so that there is consistency across the network. We want to make sure that what is done in one municipality is consistent with other municipalities so people do not get confused about the type of conditions and the type of speed limits that they would expect. Equally, though, some councils are very stretched on resources as well, so the person setting the speed limit is probably designing the road, designing the car parks, designing the football facilities. They are across many things, and they do not always have the right skills in local councils to be able to make these decisions. We have stated in our submission that local government needs a lot more support with regard to road safety, and that should come from the state. But equally I agree that local governments can also take some leadership and work with the state government. With more resources and more education—with both of those things they can make the right decisions. At the moment when we talk to local governments they see a barrier getting that approval for the speed limit reduction. There are a lot of hoops that you need to go through to get that reduction. It almost needs to be unanimous at council level before a speed reduction is put in place. Mornington Peninsula is a very good example of that, where there was unanimous support at the council level which allowed that trial to occur. If every council could do that, that would make it a lot easier for state government, but equally you should not need unanimous support to do the right thing.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you very much. One last question—through the Chair—I am just wondering, the data that you do hold from road strike, if you have collected that, can you please forward that to the committee in some way, shape or form? That would be marvellous.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: We will check out what we have got and report on it, yes.

Mr MEDDICK: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

The CHAIR: I might pass over to Lee, Rod, then myself to ask questions. I also want to remind all committee members that there will be opportunities to ask further questions if time permits.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Peter and Elvira, for your submission and for presenting today. With regard to speed enforcement and management, you suggested more should be done to restore public confidence in speed cameras to dispel the myth that they are used solely to generate revenue. Do you have any suggestions about how that could be achieved?

Ms LAZAR: This is about more transparency, so people knowing where speed cameras locations are located. And any money that is raised through speed enforcement, how that money is invested, so that there is a clear message sent that this money is funding road safety improvements; it is not just about revenue raising.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: On top of that, we have made a suggestion that rather than have a fine of \$265 or something like that and one demerit point that you actually reduce the fine—and that is for the lower speeding offences, so they are a few kilometres over—and increase the demerit points. It has been tried in South Australia. What that shows is that government is actually being very serious about the safety impacts about this; it is not about raising revenues. If you lose your licence, it is a bigger impact on you, but you should not be speeding.

Equally, some of our members have tried to get information on how the cameras work. They have really struggled to get that information back from government. So as much transparency about how the system works, what government is doing, the way the cameras work, why it is occurring, where the money is going, and

equally looking at initiatives like the one in South Australia, really sends a strong message that it is not just about raising money, this is about keeping you safe. Equally, letting people understand—there is a lot of misconception about how much speeding impacts the likelihood of you having a crash. Just a few kilometres over, as the ad used to say, really significantly increases the opportunity of a crash and the severity of a crash, so continuing to get that message across that a few kilometres over is still very dangerous and reinforcing that message through various means is very important as well.

Ms LAZAR: There is a strong perception that when you start speeding it is that higher level speeding, so going significantly over the speed limit. There needs to be this really clear message, as Peter said, that even if you are a few kilometres over, you are still going to be penalised. That is still dangerous.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you. You also suggested you evaluate available speed enforcement options so that vehicles can be detected by road safety cameras. Can you outline what vehicles currently are not being sufficiently detected by road safety cameras?

Ms LAZAR: There was a trial that was done in New South Wales that has now been implemented and is being enforced on people using their mobile phones. This is about expanding the technology that is available to detect those drivers who are doing the wrong thing, so whether they are on their mobile phones. That trial is due to happen in Victoria, but we would like to see that implemented as enforceable as quickly as possible. That has been proven in New South Wales, and we would like to see that also implemented within Victoria. The other thing to note there is that technology can also be used to detect other offences. Whether it is people not wearing their seatbelt, even speeding, that technology can be used for those offences as well.

Mr TARLAMIS: No worries, thank you.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Peter and Elvira. I was a professional driver across Victoria for 25 years and doing more than 100 000 kilometres a year. I am certainly aware of the deterioration of roads—potholes big enough to flatten tyres and damage suspension. That is one of my concerns. I just wrote down four points that concern me, and they are: training, distraction, enforcement and the environment. Obviously everyone has touched on the environment, but I will just ask you about distraction today.

In my 25 years as a professional driver I had one serious accident. It was caused by a driver driving onto the wrong side of the road at a high speed, and we had a head-on collision. I had always backed myself that I could out-drive most people—I did not see it coming. This guy came onto the wrong side of the road and we hit headlight to headlight in an offset crash. It was the fact that I was in a modern 5-star safety-rated car that I walked away with a 1-inch cut on my elbow, a 1-inch cut on my knee and a very minor fracture of the lower back, a bit like having a cracked rib. There is no doubt if I was in an older car, I would not have been getting out of that car. It concerns me there are some cars coming into this country that do not meet 1- or 2-star safety ratings. There are cars coming in at 1-star safety rating. That has got to stop. How do we convince the public that we need to bring in a higher safety standard as a matter of course?

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: With regard to the vehicle, Victoria has led the way with some of this most recently in enforcing legislation that requires certain standards in vehicles. I think we can do that again. We can look at what specific technology we want to have in cars and legislate for them to be required in any new vehicles. But there are other things we can do as well. We can look at the government fleet and make sure that every government fleet vehicle is 5 star. We can put incentives in place for the other fleets to have 5 stars as well. But on top of that, provide other incentives for people to get 5-star cars, so cash incentives—

Mr BARTON: Rego, maybe?

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: Rego and so forth. We have got to be careful as well, because by making these cars more accessible, you might be pushing down the cost of the non-safe cars. And then for those who perhaps want to buy a cheap let us say luxury car from 10 years ago or something, it pushes that price down, which makes it more accessible, which means that you also make those unsafe cars less accessible as well. We need to be careful how we do it. But finding ways to get more of these vehicles that are safe—as Elvira said in her opening statement, over half of the fatalities and injuries occur in cars that are 10 years and older. Anything we can do to get these newer, safer cars on the road and make people want to get their hands on them through financial incentives and education, through the How Safe is Your Car website and ANCAP ratings and so forth, anything we can do to make it more attractive to people needs to be looked at more broadly. It is a big item, and

it is something we can make significant inroads into. If you think of the amount of money we spend on upgrading our roads, which is in the billions of dollars, we can actually make some really significant benefits just by providing incentives for people to have these safer cars.

Ms LAZAR: In terms of car safety—and this is a central issue that we encourage the committee to take up at a federal level—we need to look at the system holistically, so what is actually coming into the country, or if that is too far away to actually get that legislated for, if we can look at what we are actually registering in Victoria first, then also look at what we are doing with the second-hand fleet and then also at the lower end—what about those older vehicles that are deemed unsafe? What happens to people who own those vehicles? How can they be taken out of the fleet completely and to get people into safer cars across the fleet?

The CHAIR: I might ask a question. I am having technical difficulties, as you can imagine. But I just have a question that was on my mind after reading your submissions about the relationship between prescription medication and driving. What research have you done and could you elaborate on what kind of public health response you believe is needed?

Ms LAZAR: There are warnings on prescription medication packets. Some people do follow those warnings, but there is also a group of people that do not really understand the effects of medications and driving or the effects of mixing those medications with alcohol. So there is more that can be done to educate the public about the length of time they need to wait after taking certain medications before they can safely drive again. So it is about the medical professionals actually giving the right information or people actually being able to seek out that information about the medications.

The CHAIR: Are you seeing a link to accidents on the road with people being on prescription medication?

Ms LAZAR: It is another factor. Health and medical conditions and medications, they can all impact someone's ability to drive safely. It is another one of those factors that people need to be mindful of that can contribute towards crashes. If you are not in a clear state of mind where you can focus your attention on the road, if you might be drowsy or whatever effects the medication might have, people need to be aware of that length of time that is needed to pass before they can drive safely again.

The CHAIR: Any other questions from committee members?

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes, thank you, Chair. Just a couple of follow-up issues. One is on making roads safer in the construction and maintenance of them, and there are very sort of prescribed rules and regulations about how road maintenance should be done, but they are actually not being complied with. For instance, the drainage on the side of the roads is not being cleared; it is full of vegetation. As I said, the vegetation is coming up from the roadside level, and even where new roads are being constructed in rural areas, the vegetation is just being cut back, not removed. And that goes to the problem of roadkill. If we want to have roadsides as wildlife corridors or conservation zones, we are going to have more roadkill and more accidents, because it is clearly unsafe to have this vegetation up against roadsides and back to a fence, both for the animals and for the drivers. But it also helps in the deterioration of the road, because if you have got trees very close to the roadside, they are actually damaging the road construction. Underneath the road construction the drainage is not valid. I have had many constructors try and point this out to me whereas we have now got local governments and VicRoads maintenance people not actually complying with their own regulations about how you do maintain roadsides to ensure that the roads are safer and last longer. And why is it that roads anecdotally seem to be much better if you cross the New South Wales border or the South Australian border than in Victoria? Do we not know how to build roads here compared to the other states?

My second point is we have a major issue in the Great Ocean Road area with international drivers making up at least 20 per cent of the accidents where ambulances are called. That does not account for accidents where no ambulance is called. Do you think there has to be better training before people can hire a car, for instance, and drive? It is actually a terribly difficult road to drive on even if you are a good driver, let alone if you have hardly ever driven a car before and you are certainly unfamiliar with divided roads.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: I will take the first part of the question. It goes to what I was saying earlier. We encourage every new road to be at a 4-star safety rating and any of our existing roads to be at a 3-star safety rating, which if you achieve those things will address a lot of the issues that you raise. The difficulty comes when you are simply just doing some maintenance to the road, because all you are possibly doing is resurfacing

or re-line marking and so forth. That goes to the whole problem of which road do you spend the most money on first to get the desired outcome you would like. Wherever possible, if you are doing some maintenance on the road, you should be trying to improve the safety of that as much as possible, so that could mean widening the shoulders, putting some rumble strips on the side of the road. Something as simple as that can still make a significant difference to—

Mrs McARTHUR: What about removing vegetation?

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: And of course removing vegetation wherever possible. It is cheaper and easier whilst you are there resurfacing to do those other things, but obviously that increases the cost. It becomes a matter of cost and ability to roll these things out, and it becomes I guess the biggest problem. If you can throw enough money and resources at it, we would highly encourage the government to do that as much as possible. Equally, as I stated earlier, we do support the safety barriers wherever possible to make sure, because once you have left the road you have lost control of your vehicle. Whether that tree is 3 metres from the side of the road or 5 metres or 8 metres or 10 metres, if you have lost control of your car at 100 kilometres per hour, you are likely to hit that tree and you are likely to be seriously injured or killed.

Mrs McARTHUR: Not if the tree was not there.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: Not if the tree was not there, but there is still a lot on a case-by-case basis that can go wrong as soon as you leave that carriageway. So wherever possible if we can put some barriers in, RACV would highly encourage that to occur as well. To answer your question, there is a lot we can be doing from the relatively low cost of just clearing all the way through to putting in shoulders, putting rumble strips in, and barriers have a role to play as well. On the second question, I will hand over to Elvira.

Ms LAZAR: On international drivers, the numbers you quoted, I am not aware of incidents being that high. We conducted research into international drivers a number of years ago so I was not aware of it being that significant. But absolutely, more can be done to educate drivers coming into the country. Whereas some people can drive on the licence that they have come into the country with, other people need to go through a more extensive process. But in these areas, where there is a high proportion of people driving from overseas, there should be education—whether it is at the point of when they pick up their car or even before they enter the country when they are planning their trip to Australia—about what is required when they drive on our roads.

Mr BARTON: I just want to ask you a quick one about driver fatigue. We know with heavy trucks there is quite a program in terms of driver fatigue, but in the commercial passenger vehicle sector, such as the taxis and the rideshare industry, we have drivers doing more than 12 hours a day—14, 16 hours a day—jumping out of a taxi after a 12 hour day, then jumping into a rideshare vehicle and driving through the night. Have you got any data or any information about driver fatigue? You probably do not have it just on the commercial passenger vehicle sector, but have you got anything on what is involved in driver fatigue in terms of overall serious accidents and death?

Ms LAZAR: We know that it is one of the major factors that contribute towards crashes, so whether it is a commercial passenger vehicle driver or just someone who is using the road network, fatigue is a big issue. Education plays a role in this, but I think more can be done about technology. So people who are tired tend to not be able to maintain their speed as well as drivers who are alert. They can also deviate from their lane, so the role of vehicle safety technology can play a role in addressing this.

Mr BARTON: And perhaps some sort of regulatory control around how many hours people can drive a vehicle and those sorts of things, which we have yet to get in the commercial passenger vehicle sector.

Ms LAZAR: Yes.

Mr QUILTY: I would like to touch back on the drug testing. You have said that drug driver testing is not perceived as adequately legitimate by the public. We are currently not testing for most drugs, and we are picking up drugs in people's system when there is no impairment, when they used cannabis two, three days, five days before. It is not clear to me why prescription drugs should not also be tested for, why that is not an issue. So is it your opinion that the drug driver program can never be legitimate when it is generating false positive tests because it is not testing for impairment? The issue is not drugs in people's system; the issue is driving impairment. Do you have an opinion on that? Do we need a better test?

Ms LAZAR: In terms of testing for alcohol, that program is well established. There is a lot of testing that happens each year. Of that about 3 per cent in comparison is what we test for in terms of drugs. So the drug testing program—there should be more research into how this program can be delivered more efficiently, more cost effectively so more tests can actually be delivered and more tests can be delivered in a more accurate and quicker way. So I think part of the reason why drug testing is lagging behind a little bit is due to that length of time needed to actually get a test result. Any way that that program can be improved and expanded should not only test for the current drugs but also be expanded to other drugs or common prescription medications where people may be driving impaired. We would support that.

Mr QUILTY: It is not clear to me—sorry, I lost my spot for a second there. Let us do this differently. We are going to legalise cannabis in a year or two. We may legalise MDMA at some point. We actually need a test that is going to test people for impairment, not just the fact that they have drugs in their system. So do you agree that we really need a test that is going to measure how people are affected rather than that they have traces of drugs in their system?

Ms LAZAR: I understand. Yes, absolutely. If there was a test available that would test for impairment, that would supersede any test that would test for the presence of drugs or medication. That would be the superior test. Absolutely, we would agree, but I am not aware of any test that does test for impairment at the moment. So research into developing a test or something like that would be welcomed.

Mr QUILTY: If I could move to a different thing now, just about data collection. You pointed out that it has been repeatedly said that we need better data collection, but it was a bit hard for me to see exactly what you are calling for in your submission. So what actually do we have to collect more data on? What do we have to do to get that better data?

Ms LAZAR: There are inconsistencies with states and territories in the way that they collect data. There are gaps in data collection. This is something that has been spoken about. It has been in strategies for many, many years that we need a system where there is a national data collection system, where all jurisdictions agree on which data is collected and it is all in one central database, and that is lacking. So at the moment we cannot accurately report on some of the major factors that we know contribute towards crashes. So if we cannot report on it, then it is difficult to measure success against that.

Mr QUILTY: It is not clear to me why we necessarily need a national approach if we are worried about what is happening in Victoria. Surely we just need much better data in Victoria.

Ms LAZAR: Victoria, but also to be able to compare it to other states and territories as well. It is not an issue specific to the state. If it can be addressed at a national level, that would be the ideal outcome, but improvements in data collection within Victoria would also help.

The CHAIR: Does anyone else have any last questions? I will allow a couple of questions.

Mrs McARTHUR: In conclusion, would you say that bad driving kills, not speed, and would you also say that bad road conditions kill?

Ms LAZAR: I think there are many factors that contribute towards crashes, so we need to look at the safe system. As we have stated up-front, we need to look at the vehicle, we need to look at infrastructure, we need to look at speed limits and also that human side of it. Where a human might make an error, there need to be redundancies built into the system so that if something goes wrong in one aspect there are enough redundancies so that someone does not actually get injured or lose their licence at the other end.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: Good drivers die as well as bad drivers, and the system needs to be more sympathetic to an error or even a bad decision. We do not want to see people dying on our roads, and all four elements of the safe system have a role to play. There are not too many people that say they are bad drivers, even though we all know they are out there, but we also know good people make mistakes—they fall asleep at the wheel, they get tired, they misjudge something—so the whole system has to work together. And there is no silver bullet to road safety. We often get a lot of calls and correspondence from people telling us how to fix road safety: ‘It’s the driver’s fault’; it is ‘blame the victim’. Sometimes it is, but it does not mean they should have to die. Through this inquiry you have got a great opportunity to tackle some very difficult issues, such as speed and the

state of our regional roads. We encourage you to look at this and make some tough decisions on some of these things because those decisions will save many people's lives.

Ms LAZAR: I think we need to make sure that people do not get complacent. Even, as we spoke about earlier, that low-level speeding—people do not see the risks in that. So there are other factors, other behaviours, that contribute towards crashes, and we need to make sure that people understand that each of those behaviours puts them more at risk. But then also the system built around that—we know that getting people into safer cars, that improving the safety of the fleet, will save lives. We know that people travelling at low speeds when something does go wrong and they do crash are going to impact at a lower speed and hopefully have a better outcome than someone who is travelling at a higher speed. So the entire system needs to be looked at completely, not just aspects of the system.

Mrs McARTHUR: At the moment, though, in rural roads, we see reduction in speed limits purely because the roads are not repaired, and that is an excuse by government not to do a job, whether it is local government or state government. So just reducing the speed limit because you have not fixed the roads surely is not something you would subscribe to.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: The problem with that is: do we wait 1000 years for that road to be fixed before we do something? As I said up-front, we would like nothing more than to see every single road upgraded to a high standard and have every one of those roads having the ability to travel at 100 kilometres an hour. The reality unfortunately is that that will take several hundred years to achieve, and we believe there is an opportunity here to look at those roads where they do not have a lot of traffic on them necessarily, they are in a very poor state and you often cannot even drive at 100 kilometres per hour. Yes, ideally you would upgrade those, but if you are not going to upgrade them, a way to immediately make that road safer is to reduce the speed limit. To just sit there and wait for that road to be upgraded rather than to do something is not appropriate.

Mrs McARTHUR: Isn't it about priorities? You would not put up with this for 5 minutes in the city and in the urban areas, but in the country, where we are producing all the produce for city dwellers to eat, to get our produce from A to B we have to endure bad road conditions and lowering speed limits because the roads are not fixed while all sorts of expenditure is spent in urban areas. I think it is surely a matter of priorities.

Ms LAZAR: I think we would like to see all of that continue, but we also want to ensure that that continues safely and people do not lose their lives as a result of that.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: As I keep saying, we would highly encourage governments to spend as much money as possible on improving all those country roads. There is no doubt about it. There is 180 000 kilometres of roads at 100 kilometres per hour, so it is no mean feat. We would encourage governments to bring up the proportion of those roads that you can safely travel at 100 kilometres per hour on as quickly as possible. However, we do not want people to die unnecessarily as we wait. Equally, as I stated earlier, where do you prioritise those? Do you prioritise it on a road that has 200 vehicles a day on it? Or do you prioritise the money where it has 2000 or 5000 vehicles a day on it and you want to encourage people to use that road at 100 kilometres per hour rather than that back road which does not have many cars on but it is not as safe? So, you are right: it is about priority—where you are going to spend your money, where you are going to make sure that road is safe to ensure you get the best outcome. And we believe the best outcome can often be achieved on those roads that you want people to be travelling on, so the higher order A roads or B roads, where they have more traffic more generally speaking.

Ms LAZAR: And time is not on our side, so I think we need to look at what can be done immediately, what can be done straightaway. People are dying every single day in Victoria and around the country. So while we need a long-term focus, we also need to bring forward and see what can be done in the short term to bring about real change.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will allow one last question. The discussion has been very exciting, actually. But I will remind everyone: please ask a question.

Mr BARTON: I will just move the subject over to my other favourite subject, which is training. I am not convinced what we are doing is as good as what it could be. The other thing I would like just to point out is: I got my drivers licence the day I turned 18, and I have never been tested 40 years later again—even though I

have done a number of training courses, anti-terrorist driving and all sorts of different things that I have done over the years. But I have never been tested again. Do you think that is right?

Ms LAZAR: At the moment the responsibility lies with the driver, so you need to make sure that you are safe to drive, you are aware of the latest road rules and so forth. So we would caution against defensive driving courses, so those types of courses that might cause drivers to be overly confident.

Mr BARTON: Overly confident, yes.

Ms LAZAR: That is right. So that can actually lead to increases in crashes, because they are facing situations that they would not normally face on a day-to-day basis. They are harsh braking conditions which hopefully no driver needs to encounter when they are driving around on the roads. So those defensive driving courses—there is evidence that those do not work. But in terms of refresher courses through drive schools or whatever the case might be, if you feel like you want to brush up on some skills, that is absolutely recommended. But those short-term courses we would caution people against.

Mr BARTON: I will only say one thing to that that blows that argument out. I will use my father, who has gone to heaven now so I cannot get in trouble with him: he always claimed he was a good driver. He was not. We had to tap him on the shoulder and stop him from driving.

Ms LAZAR: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Elvira and Peter, and to the RACV. I have enjoyed your presentation. It has been a very informative discussion to follow. I think that will probably conclude our submissions. I am aware of the time. Thank you very much for presenting today.

Ms LAZAR: Appreciate it, thank you.

Mr KARTSIDIMAS: Thanks for having us.

Witnesses withdrew.