

TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Melbourne — 18 October 2011

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Witnesses

Mr R. Toscano, director,

Mr T. Hinton, general manager, motorcycle division, and

Mr M. Collins, national rider training manager, Honda Australia Rider Training, Honda Australia Motorcycles and Power Equipment Pty Ltd.

The CHAIR — Good morning and welcome to the Road Safety Committee's public hearings regarding the inquiry into motorcycle safety. The evidence you will give will be taken down by Hansard and will have the benefit of parliamentary privilege. Comments that are made outside the room do not have that benefit. You will get a copy of the transcript in due course. Feel free to amend any typographical errors and return it to the secretariat, after which it will go online subject to any other arrangements. We are in a position where we can take evidence in camera as well. We have received some 68 submissions. There has been active interest in the work of the inquiry. We are grateful for your attention and attendance here today. We look forward to your commentary.

Mr LANGUILLER — Mr Chairman, if I may, before the commencement of the submission I indicate that my brother has on occasion received some sponsorship from Honda, and I want to declare that just in case. There is no conflict of interest, but I mention it for the knowledge of the panel and committee members.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Mr Languiller. You might amplify that so that we know in what capacity it was.

Mr LANGUILLER — Where do we start with my brother?

The CHAIR — We will keep it more specifically focused on the basis of his sponsorship, otherwise we may be here for a long time.

Mr LANGUILLER — He is a rider. He has received some support, as I understand it, by way of scooters — sponsorships — and various exercises he has conducted in promoting safe riding and so on, so I thought I would declare that. There is not much more than that. The sponsorship is never enough!

The CHAIR — In relation to scooters or motorcycles?

Mr LANGUILLER — I think scooters, and possibly motorcycles, but Honda may know more than I do.

Mr TOSCANO — Perhaps we will give our version of that before we start. As soon as we saw the structure of the committee, we recognised the name. My understanding is that the last time we dealt with Julio was probably — —

Mr HINTON — I would say it was probably five years ago.

Mr TOSCANO — He did a couple of projects for us. For example, he did a ride around Australia.

Mr HINTON — He broke a scooter record around Australia.

Mr LANGUILLER — He still claims that record.

Mr TOSCANO — That was the biggest thing. We have not had any contact with him in — —

Mr HINTON — Five years, I would say.

Mr TOSCANO — Please apologise to him for us.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that. I was not sure whether Julio Languiller was to be mentioned in the same breath as Valentino Rossi and whether our colleague had been hiding his family under a bushel for some long time!

Mr TOSCANO — We found Julio to be much more cooperative than Valentino.

Mr ELSBURY — It would be better if it were Casey Stoner.

Mr TILLEY — Before you start and in relation to this, all of the five motorcycles I have owned during my riding experience have been Hondas, but that is a matter of personal choice and does not reflect on the inquiry of this committee.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Mr Tilley. Over to Honda.

Mr TOSCANO — Firstly thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. My name is Robert Toscano, and I am director of Honda Australia Motorcycles and Power Equipment. Tony Hinton is the general manager of our motorcycle division, and Mark Collins is the manager of our national rider training operation, which we call Honda Australia Rider Training, or HART for short. Our submission is under the name of Honda Australia Motorcycles and Power Equipment, which also includes HART. Mark is our rider training and safety expert, so he will probably answer a majority of the questions today, if that is okay.

We at Honda take great interest in this inquiry from two perspectives. Firstly, Honda is the no. 1 motorcycle company in the world in terms of sales and production, as well as in Australia, but we also consider ourselves to be the leading motorcycle company in terms of safety technology and innovation. We were the first in the world to introduce airbags on motorcycles and the modern combined braking system. Even recently we introduced crumple zones on some bikes, as well as a number of other safety measures. Most recently in Australia we launched the first ABS — anti-lock braking system — on a 250cc commuter bike.

Secondly, our interest comes from the fact that we operate rider training centres in 37 countries around the world, and we have three centres in Melbourne. We believe we are the biggest rider training organisation in the country in terms of trained numbers, and we also train our dealers to be safety advisers. We have deployed quite advanced hazard perception simulators in most of our major dealerships — about 80 dealerships around the country, which is half of our dealerships and covers most of the volume.

As the leading motorcycle manufacturer in the world we take our commitment to safety very seriously. In our submission we cover a broad range of responses because of our dual interest. However, in this preamble I would like to draw out just three themes I would like to focus on. The first theme is that we consider that there is an enormous lack of and desperate need for comprehensive motorcycle usage data, for much more detailed and accurate accident reporting data and for greater knowledge and understanding of this increasing segment of road users.

The second theme is that we fervently believe improved safety can and should start with best-practice rider training combined with a sensible and relevant licensing scheme. My final theme is that key stakeholders such as us be included much more in most aspects of powered two-wheeler transport and this type of safety discussion.

I am sure you are aware that in the last few weeks the Melbourne newspapers have been screaming ‘carbon tax’, ‘congestion tax’, ‘Ride to Work Day activities’ and ‘increasing cost of living’. Today it is all about petrol pricing, so no wonder public demand for motorcycles is increasing. As I am sure you know, the ABS reported a doubling of the number of registered PTWs over the last decade — up to around 620 000 units in 2009 in Australia. These figures do not actually include a number of unregistered off-road bikes, which we consider would add another 30 per cent on top of that number.

If I can, I will try not to refer to PTWs; I struggle with that. I will call them motorcycles, but I refer to motorcycles in the broader term, including scooters. Others will separate scooters. Motorcycle growth has outstripped car growth, but it is not coming from the traditional sources of tourers and big sports-type bikes and not coming from off-road recreational bikes. It is really coming from commuter bikes and scooters, so it is bikes up to 250cc, or up to the LAMS-type bikes, and also scooters. These two segments have grown from 12 per cent of sales five or six years ago to 21 per cent of sales today, and really for good reason. I mentioned the Ride to Work Day activities before, but that was really about bicycles, not motorbikes. It is a very commendable program. You may have read in the *Age* that they ran a little contest that pitted commuters getting from the east of Melbourne to the CBD, some by public transport, some by car, some on bicycles and one on a small 50cc scooter. The best public transport took 51 minutes; by car, 45 minutes; by bicycle, 32 to 42 minutes; and the scooter took just 19 minutes and arrived quite safely.

The CHAIR — No splitting?

Mr TOSCANO — It did not follow up, but I would expect there was some of that, and we will answer that question perhaps when we get to that. I think the real point is that we are talking about 19 minutes compared to a bicycle, which took 32 minutes, so even compared to that sort of transport it has huge benefits.

Mr LANGUILLER — And/or filtering, if I may add by way of supplementary commentary.

Mr TOSCANO — Yes, or filtering. Bicycles would have filtered too, exactly. In the past motorcycles have been mainly seen as recreational vehicles, but today people really have determined that motorcycles are a very viable, economical alternative to driving a car. As we know, the purchase cost can be quite low, fuel usage is minimal, parking is easy and often free, particularly in the city. They are more efficient in terms of time compared to public transport, they can be a very logical solution to congestion issues and they are very green. There have been some studies, including Australian studies, that show that riding for commuter purposes is quite safe compared to other forms of riding.

We at Honda believe the advantages motorcycles offer are not being incorporated into the Victorian transport strategy adequately and that their benefits should really be seriously considered in congestion costs, if for no other reason. Congestion costs will rise to an estimated \$6 billion by 2020. The Victorian road safety and transport strategic action plan for PTWs 2009–13 has acknowledged this increase in commuter riding and outlined how this increased use can be incorporated into Victorian transport strategies. There are 10 actions in the strategy for the role of PTWs in the transport network. We support these actions, but our impression is that there has been little progress on these actions and that where there has been progress there has been little analysis of the outcomes. Apart from the tangible benefits derived from motorcycles in commuter use, we have to acknowledge that motorcycles, even the small commuter ones, offer the extras — escape, excitement and freedom. Those are things that can really add to the amenity of a city like Melbourne.

We believe, historically, motorcycle transport safety decisions and future directions have been based pretty much on the evidence of other countries, which in many cases have different traffic conditions, different licensing regulations and different road rules to Australia. We believe, unfortunately, some licensing decisions are based more on limiting riding exposure rather than evidence-based research that can help to minimise crash rates.

As we know, VicRoads is currently proposing a new graduated licensing scheme, or GLS, and it has stated that many of the measures are based on the gross number of motorcycles involved most often in fatalities. What it fails to recognise or chooses to ignore is that there has been a very large increase in the number of registrations in Australia and Victoria. In fact the reality is that there has been a significant reduction in fatality rates across Australia and even more so in Victoria. Our figures show that since 1980 motorcycle fatalities have been reduced from 14 to 3.5 per 10 000 registrations. I have seen some other data that takes different time periods, but in each of those cases the reductions have been quite significant. We just wonder how good the proposed solutions based on this very loose interpretation of the data are.

Often it is common that scientific data regarding motorcycles is either just not available or not vigorously pursued, so in some cases we think a trial-and-error approach exists. How can we allow rider safety to be determined by trial and error? I have come up with a couple of requests to this committee up-front. My first request in this regard is that there be a more rigorous and standardised accident investigation system and data to better understand what really contributes to motorcycle accidents and crashes and that the outcomes can be incorporated into training programs, road safety messages and any new GLS proposals. Secondly, we think it is very important that there are in-depth and ongoing studies to understand the demographics of motorcycle riders, the reasons for riding and the types of riding that are being undertaken, which will allow transport and safety agencies to understand the role of motorcyclists in the traffic mix and how this form of traffic can help to improve congestion issues and allow the agencies to better identify safety issues and target the real risk groups rather than applying a very broadbrush approach to motorcycles.

I am sure you will hear a number of submissions calling for the TAC rider levy to be dropped. We are also opposed to it for a number of reasons, which I will not go into at the moment. However, if it must exist, then we at Honda believe much greater benefits could come from it if a significant amount of money was invested in data gathering, user research, accident analysis and knowledge. Of course the benefits will only come if the results are then incorporated into the safety decision-making process.

Our second theme is training and licensing. Honda's worldwide experience tells us that high-quality rider training is one of the key factors in lowering the crash risk of novice riders on our roads. We at Honda in Australia have been quite vocal about the poor standard of the Victorian provider scheme over the last decade, and we have brought serious concerns to the attention of VicRoads on a number of occasions. Novice riders are the most at risk, and we believe the system is failing them. Honda's belief is that the current system is responsible for licensing riders with inadequate skills and knowledge, who are poorly prepared and at higher

risks of crashing. We have listed a number of proposals in our submission. Our top two are that all riders participate in skills, road craft and hazard perception training as part of the licensing process and that an on-road training component be introduced at the learner level to better prepare novice riders to interact with other traffic and to begin the development of low-risk strategies. Our training organisation, HART, pioneered this type of training to learners in 2007, and we have had very good demand and response to that type of training.

The VicRoads GLS proposal does have elements that we support; however, it also proposes many discriminatory restrictions we consider to be blunt. If you want to reduce accidents by simply reducing people getting their motorcycle licences, go with the current GLS recommendations, but if you really want to improve driver safety and reap all the benefits to congestion, efficiency, the environment and enjoyment, then we need to have a look at the GLS, and it needs some serious review.

We do support low or zero alcohol for novice riders. We do support restrictions of size and power for motorcycles during the learning phase. We do not support any measures that encourage novices to ride unlicensed due to restrictive supervisory requirements. We do not support after dark restrictions on novices because often novices are young or socioeconomically disadvantaged people and they need to use their bike as their main or only form of transport. We point out that there is absolutely no evidence to support the suggestion that having experience driving a car before riding a motorcycle can reduce rider casualties. We do support improvements to the current training and licensing system, raising the standards of training providers and removing the ridiculous test-only option. We do not offer the test-only option.

In conclusion, our final theme is that we ask to be included much more in all aspects of powered two-wheeler transport safety discussions. We can help. We want you to utilise our experience and draw on Honda's and other industry members' international experience. We offer our expertise and experience particularly in the appropriate application of safety technology. That is one of our strong points. We request an input at the planning stage, not after strategies and schemes have already been decided. We sincerely hope the outcome and recommendations of this inquiry see the light of day, unlike some previous work, and that this committee can deliver strategies that embrace the benefits of motorcycling, whilst improving the safety.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your detailed, comprehensive and thoughtful contribution with a number of specific recommendations that we look forward to deliberating upon as we work through the issues. It may well be that we make a visit to one of your centres as well, in due course, just to see it firsthand. Your industry expertise is greatly valued by us as we will be working through our recommendations to the minister.

Mr TOSCANO — Absolutely; you are welcome.

Mr PERERA — Your submission states that there needs to be motorcycle-specific education given to drivers to improve their understanding of rider safety. Can you elaborate on that? Also, could you develop further GLS recommendation by recruits?

Mr TOSCANO — I will pass that to Mark to talk about.

Mr COLLINS — In the current driver training field, driver training is very quick and very simple as far as what you need to do to get a drivers licence. There is very little effort or time spent on recognising all road users, in particular vulnerable road users like powered two-wheeler users. We would hope in the future young drivers could actually be more aware of everybody on the road. That is what will go into that question. In their training and their testing and their hazard research for training and testing there should be definite parts of that that would involve being more aware of public road users.

Mr PERERA — With any specific references to motorcycle riding?

Mr COLLINS — Yes, at intersections. Most of the multi-vehicle crashes happen between cars and motorcycles at intersections. Are people looking properly? Are they looking for everything at that intersection? Are they aware that there could be a motorcycle in a blind spot? There are many blind spots of a car such as the pillars and behind your shoulders. A lot of people in Melbourne change lanes simply looking at their side mirror and do not look into the blind spots; that is quite a commonplace scenario. There are lots of instances where driver training could improve in its ability to teach people to look out for everybody.

Mr PERERA — Can you expand on the GLS recommendations you mentioned?

Mr COLLINS — We did attach our GLS proposal in the documents that we sent to you. The major concern for us at the moment is any GLS measures which restrict the opportunity to learn and improve during the novice phase. We do see that if you have to be supervised every time you go out on a motorcycle on a learners permit it is going to restrict the opportunity to learn because a lot of people are going to find it hard to find someone to ride with. The first thing is that we do not want restrictive measures that limit the amount of learning you can do while you are on your learners. On the other hand we believe on-road experience is important and we try to deliver it.

Mr COLLINS — For some years now — more than five years — we have been delivering an on-road rider training service to learners. We identified that this was a big gap in the Victorian system many years ago. It has been very successful. The learners who are unable or unwilling to take that next step on the road get supervised by a professional and we find that that part of the GLS would be very beneficial if there was some component within the licensing system that allowed a professional to take a learner on the road and give him some feedback.

The CHAIR — One of our research staff has been out of the room momentarily and I would like to draw to his attention your recommendation regarding the blind spots in cars and an aspect of driver training that might better address that as an issue, because we have focused on motorcycle safety and training but there is the issue of driver safety and training. I think you made a very good point in relation to that aspect of the blind spots that operate for motorists and how that awareness could be more strongly inculcated in motorists on the road as well. Allied to that was your comment, which we are aware of, that most accidents occur at intersections and the factors that are aligned there. I just wanted to make that point for the record.

Mr TOSCANO — And reinforcing that, the added factor in the drop in driver awareness is the growing number of bicyclists on the road as well. The same conditions and the same rules apply there. They are often riding in the same conditions, so it is a really important thing that we broaden the scope to drivers as well as all road users.

The CHAIR — You make a good point there and I encourage you even to work with the Amy Gillett Foundation and other people from Bicycle Victoria who are advocating on this point so that that awareness is elevated to a high profile sooner rather than later. Only recently there was a death on Beach Road near an intersection in Brighton where a cyclist was killed in quite tragic circumstances.

Mr ELSBURY — As a follow-on from the line of questioning about drivers being given specific education, would you encourage the driver to be able to gain experience of the motorcyclist by undertaking some sort of motorcycle course? I can say with my own experience, having just taken the training offered by another provider — but do not hold that against me — —

Mr TOSCANO — We checked.

Mr ELSBURY — They were just closer. But being able to get that experience of being on the bike and understanding just how exposed you are on a bike, it has opened my eyes as to the other vehicles on the road, including motorcyclists.

Mr TOSCANO — Yes, to be perfectly honest, we have often — I was going to say ‘joked’ but that is not the case — wished that in our organisation, because all of us who have ridden bikes would agree with that. But we really are faced with the practicality that it is just never going to happen. As much as we would wish for it, it is just never going to happen. Most riders will tell you that they are better car drivers because of that experience. I have not ridden for a long time, but when I did ride I felt the same, many years ago, but you are talking about completely different sides of the pond.

Mr ELSBURY — Going back to the training of motorcyclists, a number of the submissions that we have received state the current training and licensing regime is inadequate and that people who lack the skills and knowledge to ride a motorcycle were being passed. What responsibility do providers have not to pass people who clearly have inadequate skills or knowledge?

Mr TOSCANO — As I said, there are some things that we just will not do. We will not do a test-only in any of our driving centres in Australia because we consider that would be irresponsible of us. We will lose business

but it does not matter to us because we are bigger than that. We resisted — Mark, you can correct me — for a long time, running shorter courses. For a long time we insisted that our rider courses be two-day courses.

Mr COLLINS — For novices, yes.

Mr TOSCANO — For novices, and it was only recently by force of the market that we reduced it to a one-day course. But I still say that within one day we offer a whole lot more things than training people to pass the test. We make them do the hazard perception work on the simulator, we have very extensive ranges and we consider that we set our standards quite high. I guess we are comparing whether you do the business or you do not do the business. To answer your question, we have a responsibility, and we take it to a certain extent. But we think the current situation of offering some training at our standard is better than going out of business and not offering any training in that regard. It is a hard question to answer, I am sorry, but that is our feeling in general.

Mr LANGUILLER — Thank you for your submissions and certainly for the work you do in terms of safety issues. My question follows on from that of my colleague. You state that a number of the graduated licensing measures being considered by VicRoads will discourage novice riders. Can you elaborate further on that?

Mr COLLINS — The first one I mentioned just before about having to be supervised on a learner permit will restrict the amount of riding I can do. I will have to find someone to ride with. That is one restriction. Extending the duration of the learning period from 15 months to 3 years I find restrictive. As to after-dark riding by novices, if you tell a young person he can ride a scooter but only in daylight hours, it is really not worth getting a scooter. He is going to be using it to get to and from uni and to and from work of an evening, so I think that could be restrictive. These are measures that VicRoads has proposed in reducing the number of crashes that novices have. But we are finding that if you do not allow people to practise and do not give them experience in that learning phase, they are not going to be good riders, there are going to be less riders, and that in some respects is possibly the end game here: if you can lower the number of people riding, you will have less crashes. We do not believe that is a good strategy. We believe that as a short-term win, not a long-term gain.

Mr TOSCANO — Talking about supervised rides, there is even a question about the quality of supervised rides. I am not an expert. I have a 19-year-old daughter who recently sat with me for the best part of 120 hours while learning to drive, but I sat with her in the same cabin and talked to her and occasionally reached for the handbrake and never had to use it. But it occurs to me that on a ride on a motorcycle, where does the motorcycle supervisor sit? Does he sit in front of the learner? Does he sit behind the learner? Does he sit next to the learner? Can he tell the learner what is happening? It does not make any sense. It is just like two people going for a ride; it does not actually add to the safety of the actual ride and improve the experience or knowledge. We think professional trainers are the way to go, but professional training on a supervised number of hours can cost \$6000, \$10 000 or \$15 000, which makes it absolutely restrictive. The bike itself is not worth that. We sell scooters for \$2000.

Mr LANGUILLER — I think you have heard me ask this question before. Do you see there is a role for clubs — for example, where, subject to partnerships with VicRoads and other training providers and so on, they could potentially assist particularly novice riders in gaining experience and perhaps even play a role in mentoring, if you like, new riders, subject to all the usual requirements that would have to be put in place? I am cognisant that people do not wish to increase red tape and regulation and so on and so forth, but would there not be a role for the clubs?

Mr COLLINS — Having grown up learning to ride motorcycles from my friends, from my mentors, I was probably put through all the bad habits and shown all the wrong ways to do everything for the first five years of my riding. Where do you draw the line as far as professional instruction and feedback and an I'll-show-you-what-to-do, follow-me type of approach? I do not believe your friends and your mates in your club are possibly the right people to show you how to start riding, unless they are properly trained as coaches.

Mr LANGUILLER — What I am suggesting is, subject to proper training. In fact it has been suggested to me that — and I am certainly not aware of the clubs and the coaches and the knowledge — there could be a club or two that could probably be useful. I am just thinking in terms of the riders out there, as you know, not being able to afford to pay professional trainers X amounts of money; the people I represent in the western suburbs cannot afford to do that. But if there was a constructive role, subject to the training that would be

required and a proper partnership, which we do in other jurisdictions in a whole range of ways — for example, we do it in lifesaving. The majority of lifesavers in the country are volunteers; my children are. We do it with fighting fire; the majority of firefighters happen to be volunteers. I question why clubs are not engaged in a more community-oriented fashion. Perhaps we can get more out of clubs in a proactive way. I am just putting that with a question mark. It is not something I have considered very carefully, I must say on the record, but it entered my mind that we could probably find a good role for clubs to play given that everybody suggests that we need more training but people submit to the committee that training is very expensive and therefore not affordable and perhaps members, particularly in your own circle, may not be able to afford it.

Mr TOSCANO — I do not think we say anywhere that training should be minimised. We think that — —

Mr LANGUILLER — No, I did not say that.

Mr TOSCANO — People do need to invest a reasonable amount in training.

Mr LANGUILLER — Yes.

Mr TOSCANO — Whether it is with us or with other training providers, or whoever. But we think once we start talking about a huge number of hours of supervised professional training, or restrictive amounts of money, then that becomes a problem. Like you, I do not think we have thought deeply about the club suggestion. Sorry, perhaps Tony has.

Mr HINTON — I have — —

Mr LANGUILLER — Do you mind if I interrupt? I want to be absolutely clear in terms of my proposition. I am not suggesting for a second that you replace the existing training and potential basic minimum requirement in terms of training with clubs; I am not suggesting that.

Mr TOSCANO — I understand.

Mr LANGUILLER — But it is post that stage, after the basic requirements and tests and so on have been done, and on an ongoing basis from then on. I am absolutely clearly suggesting a complementary role at some stage post the minimum requirement, whatever that may be.

Mr HINTON — Just based on that I guess at the moment the average age of the learner coming through our rider trainer facility is somewhere between the 18-to-25 year mark. I just think that if we are going to have some sort of supervision that is going to be done out on the road, it has to be a practical solution. I just have to say that at the moment the majority of 18 to 25 year olds who are coming into motorcycling are generally not members of clubs and are not associated with them because they are basically new to motorcycling. What tends to happen is that the older you get within the motorcycle fraternity and community, then you start to make connections with those sorts of clubs, but to begin with you do not. All I am suggesting is that anything we are going to do with regard to that supervision just needs to be practical and doable.

Mr TOSCANO — But we will take that idea away and think about it, because it is not something we have thought hard about.

Mr LANGUILLER — Yes. Further, if I may clarify my position, I am not suggesting that it be compulsory, but simply that it be an option.

Mr TOSCANO — Yes.

Mr HINTON — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — Gentlemen, I have four questions. They will relate to the safety levy, some training audits, some commentary in relation to some earlier submissions the committee has heard already, and some government agency procurement things, particularly ABS. The first one relates to the safety levy. In your submission you detail the levy is a discriminatory tax and what it has been used for — for funding black spots in particular — that it should have been funded by general VicRoads funding and that no other use group is forced to pay for the road network in this fashion. Can you elaborate to the committee on why you think the motorcycle safety levy should be scrapped?

Mr COLLINS — Seeing that 80 per cent of that money is being spent on black holes — —

Mr TOSCANO — Black spots.

Mr COLLINS — I was going to try to be smart and say ‘potholes’.

Mr ELSBURY — Black holes are really hard to get rid of.

Mr COLLINS — I question the value of rider levy money being spent on road fixes, and I question the benefits that have been reported to date on how effective those fixes have been. If you measure something six months after you have fixed it, of course there is a honeymoon period and you will have a great effect. Over a longer period of time we need to continue measuring those fixes as to whether they have been good. In that respect, if 80 per cent of that money raised has been spent on normal road fixes, I have a question mark there.

Mr LANGUILLER — Just on that subject, if I may, the TAC submitted to us yesterday that \$53 million per annum is collected, which constitutes 3.5 per cent of TAC revenue, and they suggested further that in 2010, \$152 million was paid in compensation to riders, which constitutes 20 per cent. I am just putting that to you.

Mr COLLINS — So are you saying that other road users are funding the rehabilitation of riders?

Mr LANGUILLER — No. The TAC would say to you that the contribution is in the order of \$53 million in terms of revenue, but the expenditure associated with compensating riders is \$152 million. I am just putting that to you. It was their submission yesterday.

Mr COLLINS — There are other road groups that are overrepresented as well. Learner drivers would be a huge cost in their rehabilitation as well. There is exchange from one area to another within the TAC funding.

The CHAIR — We might just hold that point at this stage. We have a few more questions and time is running out.

Mr TILLEY — Just going directly onto the next question on training audits, your submission states the current licence training system could produce safer riders if it was managed and audited properly. I am just hoping you might be able to expand on that. You may have heard the previous submission from Armstrong’s in relation to the audit. What is the experience in particular for HART?

Mr COLLINS — I think what Armstrong’s said is fairly correct: that the audits centre around whether the testing is carried out properly. It can be a surprise audit or it can be a planned audit, and I think in the case of a planned audit everyone gets everything in a row and gets it all very organised. But I guess most of the industry believes there are a lot of other things going on out there that probably are not picked up by the current VicRoads audit procedure that are lowering the standard or reducing the quality and skill of the riders coming out the other end.

Mr TILLEY — One thing that Armstrong’s did say was about registered training authorities, or RTOs — —

Mr COLLINS — Registered training organisations?

Mr TILLEY — Yes, sorry.

Mr TOSCANO — We are, but I do not know if that is really critical. Being an RTO means you have to meet certain standards and there are some requirements, but I do not know — is it really critical?

Mr COLLINS — I think it leads to better administration. Being an RTO would definitely improve your administration. It does not necessarily improve the quality of the delivery of the training, and that is where we are coming from — it is the delivery of the training.

Mr TILLEY — So it might be more of a case of QA than being a registered training organisation.

Mr TOSCANO — I think we need to wind it back a bit and say it is as much to do with the curricula and the elements of the training as it is to do with the audit. If the actual training is very limited, then they are only auditing that end of the training. So let us not just say it is an audit issue: it is actually the whole curricular issue

and some of those other elements that we talked about. It is a bigger subject than just the audits. The audits will pick out some people who are taking shortcuts, but it will not necessarily just lift the whole level or quality of people being trained. There has to be a broader view of it.

Mr TILLEY — I will go on to obtain your view about another issue. In particular the Department of Sustainability and Environment said in its submission that in Victoria there is something like 40 000 kilometres of roads in our forests and parks. As to whether we are seeing an increase in the number of injuries, certainly we are lacking in data; we are seeing a whole range of things in relation to off-road riding. In other submissions we have received, when they talk about off-road they are talking about it in a safe driving environment. I am specifically talking about off-road riding on unsealed tracks and surfaces. Does HART offer any training? Alternatively, do you have a view as to the benefits of off-road riding being transferred to road craft onto the roads?

Mr COLLINS — There are two questions there. Yes, we do offer off-road training for novices so we can give them a start in how to handle an off-road bike. But I see the two types of riding as quite separate. To ride out on Spring Street on a motorcycle in that sort of traffic involves a completely different skill set than riding through a bush track. I do not think the current Victorian provider system is preparing off-road riders very well for the bush tracks, and unfortunately we are not doing a fantastic job of preparing road riders for heavy traffic situations either under the current guise.

Mr TILLEY — As a commentary and in talking about personal experiences, would it be fair to say that some of those things that you learn in an off-road environment — some of your balance techniques and some of your slow manoeuvring as well — are transferable to on-road situations in some regards?

Mr COLLINS — Sure. Some of the skills are across both areas, but we believe at HART that the thing that will keep you safe out there is your ability to anticipate what is coming up, what is about to happen: your ability to pick the most dangerous thing, identify the hazard and respond before you have to brake or corner or swerve. That is why we use simulators to train our novices: to give them a better idea of what to anticipate, how to look out for things and what will cause them the most danger. I think the mental skills sometimes outweigh the physical skills of braking or swerving.

Mr TILLEY — Sure. This is just going onto a separate issue again. It was interesting to note that early in your submission today you talked about fitting ABS braking systems, and firstly you talked about 250cc motorcycles.

Mr TOSCANO — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — We heard a submission yesterday, particularly from Victoria Police, that it is a procurement issue. I am just trying to establish that one of your competitors is their preferred type of equipment, based largely on ABS braking. It is a competitive market. I am probably more interested in its application. The benefit of ABS braking on motorcycles is probably what I really want to get to rather than necessarily the procurement issues in relation to what Victoria Police does and does not do.

Mr TOSCANO — The first thing that needs to be stated is that ABS does not necessarily suit all bikes. Even in the bikes that it does suit, it does not necessarily suit them in all riding conditions. People still need a choice. We also supply bikes to police departments, and they always specify ABS. Progressively we are trying to introduce more options of ABS across our range. I would not let my kids buy a car with ABS, so I think that option needs to be available for motorcycles as well.

But it is not as simple as saying you need ABS on all products. The ABS system on a big sports bike, the sort of bike that the police are buying, is a different sort of ABS than would go on the 250cc commuter bike that we are selling at the moment.

If the question is whether there is a future for ABS, the answer is, 'Absolutely, yes'. But it is also very much market driven: you can offer it, and offer it even at the right price, and people still do not want it. As Honda we are trying to push it more into the market, and we are seeing with this commuter bike the acceptance of ABS is even higher than we anticipated, and that has given us heart as well for future products. Last month the take-up was close to 50 per cent on that commuter bike, so that is extraordinary.

Mr TILLEY — As an option?

Mr TOSCANO — As an option, yes.

Mr TILLEY — Can you give us some commentary maybe on the costs? If it is market driven, does it become cost prohibitive depending on the market?

Mr TOSCANO — There is a cost. As I said, there is a difference between the types of ABS on a small, light product, and of course the dynamics of the bike have a lot to do with the type of ABS required. We introduced the ABS on the 250cc bike at a very competitive price, at about 10 per cent of the retail price of the bike, and that seems to have hit the mark.

Mr HINTON — Can I just add to it?

Mr TILLEY — Sure.

Mr HINTON — There are three types of ABS systems, and depending upon the technology that has been put into it, the price reflects that. So on one of our sports bikes at the moment, which is an electronically controlled ABS system, it is different and more expensive than the system on our 250cc road bike. It just means the pricing point is higher, but we just try to make sure that the ABS, when we have got them available, is available as a variant for the customer.

Mr TILLEY — That was great. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Our time is running close to the line. There are a number of points that I would like to still get on the record at the moment, but perhaps treat the answers fairly succinctly and we can follow them up. Let us at least raise them on the record and there may be follow-up opportunities. We have got a number of other witnesses we would like take evidence from today.

Mr LANGUILLER — Correct me if I am wrong but in your earlier submission, Robert, you appeared to express a degree of frustration in terms the engagement or lack of with government agencies, particularly in relation to safety issues. I think all of us think that you do a lot of work in relation to safety. Can you expand on that further?

Mr TOSCANO — I will hand to Mark in a minute, because Mark has sat on a number of committees which were set up to improve communication. The whole industry would say that we get lots of surprises. We got a surprise yesterday regarding the number of people not paying fines on motorcycles. We have been asking for this data for an inordinate amount of time, and we get surprised in an inquiry. Our opinion is that anything to do with safety should be shared so that we can react and try to work through it. Getting surprises like that just makes us wonder how much else is being withheld from us. I will hand to Mark, because I am not succinct otherwise.

Mr COLLINS — I would have to follow that up quite quickly and say, yes, the amount of information coming our way and the opportunities to comment on that information before a decision is made or a direction is taken is minimal, so we are frustrated in that respect in that we do not often get to have input at the critical period, like now when you are going to be sitting down talking, discussing and legislating. This is a great opportunity, but we do not often get this opportunity.

The CHAIR — Thank you. My colleagues to the left will be posing some questions. Again, could you be mindful of keeping your answers reasonably succinct.

Mr PERERA — The committee understands that you use simulators in your training. How effective do you find them to be, and what prompted you to use them?

Mr COLLINS — Honda Worldwide has simulators, so we were able to draw on their expertise and introduce them in Australia. I have not measured the success of the simulators as far as novice riders being less able or more able to avoid crashes, but the people who get off the simulators are hazard aware — they know the typical scenarios they are likely to face on the road, and being more aware of something gives you more time to react and respond and recognise the difficulty. I am sorry I do not have a measure of its success. There a couple

of papers out internationally saying that there are positive benefits. In Australia we have not measured that. It is very hard to measure the benefit of a simulator. I will not go into all the details of it.

Mr TOSCANO — I think it would not be hard to jump to the conclusion that if you can throw up things that are dangerous in real life and get people to at least practise them or be aware of them, then it has got to be of benefit.

Mr COLLINS — We would invite you to all come out and have a go on the simulator. You do not have to be a rider; it is all about recognising crash scenarios.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Mr Collins; we will do that, but you might nominate Mr Elsbury to bring us out.

Mr ELSBURY — Just going back your experience with government, what has your experience been in relation to VMAC and the MAG set-ups?

Mr COLLINS — Unfortunately we have been left off the new VMAC, and we are a little bit disappointed. We feel we have a lot to offer that committee and the Victorian government. The committee had a lot of potential. We had a lot of interesting projects on the go, but in some ways I felt that there was an agenda and we were just passengers on a train, and that the train was already headed in a direction.

Mr ELSBURY — Or maybe a pillion.

Mr COLLINS — A pillion! I do not really know the effectiveness of that committee going forward. I do not know how their expertise will be taken on board by VicRoads, so I guess we do have concerns going forward with that type of committee.

Mr ELSBURY — In your submission you state that the current CE standard for protective clothing is a better way of achieving road safety outcomes than the star rating. Can you explain why you believe this is the case?

Mr COLLINS — There is a current CE standard for clothing that exists. I think what is being proposed is that we develop another, separate standard, which would involve having to test all articles of clothing and protective gear. Why invent a new standard when one exists already? Why can we not just get on with what is currently accepted as high-quality protective clothing and move forward? It is there already.

The CHAIR — Is that an industry issue for Honda as well in terms of how any of your products might be presented?

Mr TOSCANO — We are not in that business. Our dealers are, so we have an interest in that, but we do not sell clothing as such.

The CHAIR — Thank you. That is all I need.

You referred to past research that has not been released. Can you briefly elaborate on this point about past research that you would have liked to have seen released?

Mr COLLINS — There is a lot of scooter data that has been collected and not shared outside VicRoads. I am sure Hollie will speak about that later. I am not sure of all the papers. We seem to get involved at the beginning of projects where there will be some investigation on a particular area, but we do not often find out about how it is going or what the outcomes were until a decision has been made based on that research. I am sorry, I do not have on hand the incidences of that. I cannot recall them right now.

The CHAIR — I have perhaps a final point separate to the other. There are technologies, such as ISA — intelligent speed adaptation — that has been mentioned as having some potential. I would be interested, if not now, then on another occasion, to gain an appreciation of any safety-oriented technologies which are being applied to the marketplace at the present time or are not far away from implementation in the marketplace. Are you able to comment on that?

Mr TOSCANO — I am not sure if there is an easy, short answer. That might be something that we feed back to you. I think I already mentioned that we have adapted an airbag for one bike, but the bike is not really a

suitable product for airbags, so it is quite an unusual bike. There are other technologies where we introduced crumple zones on a bike. It might seem a bit silly, but it actually has some proven benefits. Honda has a bunch of things that are being tried in different parts of the world.

The CHAIR — Could I leave it as a question on notice? Could you communicate with us in writing giving us some headings of what the technologies might be. Specifically I am interested in devices that may record speeds over distance over traffic speed zones just to see whether that is readily available and could be applied to recidivist drivers who are seeking to gain their licences back, if there was such a device.

Mr COLLINS — There is one issue with that mechanism. If you were to record a higher-than-allowable speed and cut power to a motorcycle mid-corner, you will lose direction and run off the corner, so you would need to be really careful if you were thinking about — —

The CHAIR — We take your advice on that. We are not about to implement anything.

Mr COLLINS — When I hear that, bells go off in my head and I worry that we do not understand the full story. It might sound like a great idea, but it might be incredibly dangerous.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Gentlemen, thank you very much for the time you have given. You bring great expertise to our deliberations. You bring a contrary view along the way as well, which is based also on your international experience, your market knowledge and the products that you have in the marketplace. We are very grateful for your time, and we look forward to a report from Mr Elsbury on his visit to the simulator and rider experience. We trust he passes that.

Mr ELSBURY — I am actually interested in the on-road training; I would not mind taking you up on that.

Mr COLLINS — Sure. We can organise that.

The CHAIR — He will be a paying customer as well!

Mr TOSCANO — They are the only ones we have!

The CHAIR — Thank you for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.