ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IN CAR PARKS

Melbourne — 14 September 2009

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Mr J. Hondrakis, team leader, transport management, Boroondara City Council.
The CHAIR — Thanks you very much for being here this morning to assist the Road Safety Committee’s inquiry into pedestrian safety. As you can see, we are recording the evidence, and you will be provided with a copy, to have a look at and suggest changes as you see fit. Also, parliamentary privilege is not afforded to you if you make any comments outside of this building. Could you introduce yourself and proceed with your presentations? We will ask questions as we go.

Overheads shown.

Mr HONDRAKIS — Thank you, Chair. My name is Jim Hondrakis. I am from the City of Boroondara. I am in the engineering and traffic area. I have been at council for 12 years, and I have focused on engineering and traffic, particularly transport planning. I have had experience with car park design, pedestrian safety, road safety — a little bit of everything.

Thank you for the opportunity today. I will briefly run through this presentation. Effectively we have got 188 off-street car parks under the control of council. A lot of our car parks are actually in strip shopping centres, so we are talking about a lot of at-grade car parks as distinct from multi-level car parks. We do have a few multi-level car parks, but generally they are two to three storeys at an absolute maximum. We also have a lot of car parks in our reserves and parks. We have a lot of sporting facilities. Spread out through Boroondara there are lots of car parks in these areas. In addition to that there are car parks at council facilities, such as library car parks, our recreation centres — which are fairly big; we are talking in the order of 200-plus spaces — community centres and child care centres. Again, there are a smaller number of car parking spaces in addition to some council offices. In a nutshell, it could be anything from three or four spaces up to 300 to 400. By and large they are not metered, and a few metered.

In terms of crashes, we do not have a formal record within council. Most of the crashes that we expect would be minor generally do not involve a police report, and if there is no police report, then effectively it does not appear on a police record or the VicRoads road accident database.

We expect any incidents to generally involve low-speed impacts — a lot of reversing movements. That is one the key issues here. A lot of people are reversing and cannot see what is coming up behind them — also, at the access points leading into and out of our car parks. In terms of severity, again we would be generally looking at minor or non injury.

The VicRoads road accident database effectively records every police-reported accident. Whilst it includes incidents on the road network, it does also include car park access points and within car parks, so that is a useful tool as well.

I want to briefly talk about some of the measures that we implemented in Boroondara. A lot of these measures have been introduced progressively over the last 10 years. We do have a lot of old car parks when standards were very different, and we have got some pretty unique layouts, which necessarily do not meet best practice.

Some of the good safety measures that we incorporate within our car parks are designated pedestrian walkways. We think they are a bonus in terms of minimising risk, and also giving pedestrians a sense of priority and direction, and also a guiding aspect to get them to the main pedestrian corridors. Some of you may be familiar with the Camberwell junction precinct, where we have Safeway and Target fronting onto Burke Road. That car park does have lots of those pedestrian walkways. We think that is something that we should be looking at more and more.

Notwithstanding that, we also have got a fairly strong program on disabled parking bays, so we have got an ongoing program to not only retrofit and upgrade but to also make sure that any bays are located conveniently to these access points. We are a strong advocate for lower speed limits in general as a Boroondara. Within some of our car parks we have advisory speed signs — 10-kilometre advisory signs — and we supplement those with pedestrian warning signs. It is to identify the need for a low-risk speed environment, and also the presence of pedestrians. In shopping centre car parks we are talking about hundreds of movers.

Mr KOCH — Why some car parks and not the others? Is this particularly the size of the car park, or are some more necessary than the others?

Mr HONDRAKIS — We think the high-turnover car parks — the low turnover could be employee, office components — are the ones where you get a lot of movements and a lot of pedestrian activity, particularly during peak hours. We think the need for caution and an increased sense of awareness is a good thing. I know the previous speaker spoke about their views on speed, and I tend to agree.
I think we should be looking at engineering measures, but we think some kind of speed limit — regulatory or advisory — would be of benefit in terms of reinforcing the need for caution and a reduced speed in an environment wherein, in all honesty, a lot is going on — lots of turning movements, pedestrians, young kids, parents with prams, and people in wheelchairs. We think that is a good thing.

One of the other measures is speed control. We mentioned before about the long aisles. Obviously you want to discourage that, but even in a fairly short aisle you can gather a little bit of speed. People tend to be in a hurry at times, some form of speed control would be beneficial not only in reinforcing the speed limit but effectively discouraging speed. The form of speed control could be humps, integrated plateaus or longer humps, but that is a fairly important consideration.

We spoke about the long aisles. Where we can we should be avoiding those, again, purely in the interests of minimising speed.

We have line-marked some of our car parks with give-way line marking, particularly at intersecting aisles. Again, it is really to indicate to people that there is some need for caution at an intersection, in the sense of a road intersection or an intersection of two aisles within a car park. Again, it is to minimise any errors that may occur. Some form of give-way line marking would be beneficial.

In terms of some of the other recommendations, sometimes when you actually enter a car park you have got cars right next to you. Someone could be reversing as you are entering a car park. What we say there is: effectively, if there is going to be any car parking, make sure that it is set back well clear of the intersection itself so we do not have that potential conflict when someone is actually entering a car park and someone is inadvertently reversing at that particular location.

One of the other areas is zebra crossings or pedestrian crossing facilities. We think that is a good thing. It has worked very well in some of our car parks — the high-turnover car parks and the shopping centre car parks. The example would be the Camberwell junction precinct, where a lot of those car parks were reconstructed back in 1995. In terms of a car park, they are not that old, but they did incorporate some fairly useful and innovative measures at that time. Effectively they raised zebra crossings along dedicated pedestrian corridors within a car park. We think that is a fairly useful measure.

I want to add a comment on some of our master plans or structure plans for our activity centres — our big shopping centres. There is a greater focus on looking at car parks a bit differently. In the past they have been looked at as just car parks, but now people are starting to look at them particularly as people places. Is it just a car park? What we are trying to do at Boroondara is come up with some fairly pedestrian-friendly measures to incorporate within car parks — some landscaping, dedicated footpaths and crossings such that it is a car park but at the same time it recognises the fact that there is a lot of pedestrian activity in these car parks.

The CHAIR — Just on that, do you get suggestions of ideas, complaints about car parks from the general public?

Mr HONDRAKIS — We get them all the time.

The CHAIR — How do you deal with that?

Mr HONDRAKIS — It depends on the nature of the issue. It could be parking infringements — they would be directed through to our local laws department. It could be safety measures. If we do have a safety measure that is reported — it could be a cracked footpath, it could be a pothole, it could be some pedestrian fencing that has been knocked down, it could be a damaged sign — that gets registered on our database registry system and it is actioned to an officer and assessed. Depending on the severity or the issue at stake — —

The CHAIR — Or who owns the car park, if it is private.

Mr HONDRAKIS — If it is private, then we refer it through to the owner of the car park. We have quite a few private car parks. We do have agreements with those private car parks with respect to enforcement. We have the contacts. If there is an issue that concerns a private car park, then that is referred through to the owners for their attention. By the same token, we do work with any developers or private car park operators with respect to improvements, so we are quite supportive of that.

The CHAIR — Do you think the enforcement powers are enough to convince the private owners?

Mr HONDRAKIS — I probably cannot answer that question. Are we talking about retrospective changes?
The CHAIR — Any changes.

Mr HONDRAKIS — I do not know what the formal mechanism is in that regard, but I think there could be a lot more cooperation between both parties to improve existing conditions. One of the issues is ageing infrastructure. One of the other areas that we are heavily committed to is lighting. We have a lighting upgrade program and progressively we have been upgrading lighting in all our car parks. Within the Glenferrie precinct itself, we have got a fairly substantial budget allocation for this financial year to do a complete upgrade of all the lighting. That is in response to pedestrian safety and security. We have got evening issues there with some nightclubs, so council has allocated some fairly significant funds to improve lighting in car parks that already have some lighting. It is bringing it up to that next level.

Mr KOCH — Jim, is there a fine line between car park recreation areas with more landscaping where you have got more pedestrians remaining on the site instead of moving in and out of retail — which I assume the parking spaces are made available for initially — and taking that further, more children will be found in car parks with their parents if there are playgrounds or something like that put in there. From a planning point of view, are you conscious of this, and how are you addressing it, if you are going down that path as you indicated earlier?

Mr HONDRAKIS — It is a very good question. If we spoke to some traders, their preference would be to maximise the number of car parking spaces within an area. We can do that with the standards. Notwithstanding that, there also needs to be recognition that we are going to have dedicated pedestrian lines within a car park. How do we accommodate that? It tends to be a bit of a compromise. In the past it was always, ‘We have X amount of land here. Put in as many spaces as you can’. Now I think that tide is changing and there is a recognition that there is a need to look at things a little bit differently.

We spoke about pedestrian safety measures — the walkways, the speed control, the signage. We are also looking at landscaping as well — street trees et cetera. It is a fine line. In the end it comes down to a bit of a trade-off or a council decision where effectively everyone is given an opportunity to put a case forward.

I think what is also relevant, too, is we are working on a number of structure plans or 10 to 15-year blueprint documents for our activity centres. All of those structure plans have got recommendations in there with respect to improving the quality and the safety of car parks. Whilst in the past it was always, ‘Put in as many as we can’, now there is a recognition, even at a structure planning detail level, that there is a need to do things a bit differently, which is a good thing in the sense that once a plan is adopted, as officers it gives us a bit of leverage to implement those measures.

The other area is landscaping. We briefly spoke about that. It really is to soften the environment rather than have a fairly big, wide open space. Also, if we can get some upper canopy trees in there as well or some sympathetic planting, it can visually lead to a disincentive to speed. We think that is a fairly good initiative as well.

This is Camberwell Junction. This is where we have integrated some crossing facilities — zebra crossings — with some speed humps. Again, it is really to slow people down, and it is at a pedestrian’s eye line. We have a fairly wide footpath linking two big department stores in Safeway and Target through to Burke Road. We have thousands of people using that corridor. Again, it is about recognising where people want to go and trying to maximise their safety and encouraging them to use that facility as well.

If we look at the photo to the left, you can see where that blue vehicle is parked. It is set back significantly from Station Street itself. Again, what we want to try to avoid here is the vehicle entering that car park when someone is reversing. When people reverse, generally they have got a car park on either side of them. They look around and it is quite difficult to see what is coming up behind them. This is where we think some form of regulatory or speed signage would be beneficial — like I said, purely in the sense of raising awareness and encouraging slower speed environments and minimising the potential for any type of incident.

The photograph to the right shows some ‘Give way’ line marking. That is actually at two aisles. We have examples of where we have cross aisles as well. It is almost like two intersecting roads. Again, here it is minimising any confusion. Sometimes people seem to be in a hurry. They think, ‘Here is a parking spot. I will quickly nip in here and nip out’.

The CHAIR — I noticed out of those four cars one of them has reversed into the park. What is your view on reverse parking and driving out of parks?
Mr HONDRAKIS — I think that can work. It is how we do that. If you are exiting in a forwards direction, it is a lot easier to exit in a forwards direction rather than reversing. By the same token you have to reverse into a parking bay. I think that can work. We can promote it through signage, so that is certainly an option. In a car park you will find that people can enter a normal car parking bay normally, but one out of three will reverse park. If we want to promote that, if we get designated walkways within a car park, that can be promoted through some signage.

I mentioned before speed control. What we have done is we have got some 10-kilometre-per-hour advisory speed signs. Again, we do not think it is harmful. They alert users to the need for some caution in a car park. This car park is not a very high turnover car park, but I think some form of speed signage, integrated with some engineering sorts of treatments, would be beneficial and reinforce the need for caution and a low-speed environment within these car parks.

These are some of the suggestions we put into our submission. We believe there is a need for a lower speed limit. We spoke about a code of practice as well. Generally we tend use Australian Standard 2890.1, the Victorian planning scheme, there are VicRoads guidelines and there is the Austroads Guide to Traffic Engineering Practice. If you look at all those four documents, you will find that they are not the same in terms of car park aisle widths, car park lengths, car park bay widths et cetera. So what we are talking about here is coming up with a consistent sort of design document rather than having the three or four standards that effectively interplay at this point in time. I think that would be good. And also it highlights best practice. This is what we should be looking at.

Mr KOCH — Does the MAV or the ALGA buy into this situation, or are individual councils endeavouring to do this off their own bat?

Mr HONDRAKIS — We have not raised it with the MAV. I think it is something that could be raised with them.

Mr KOCH — I would have thought that was your first port of call.

Mr HONDRAKIS — Look, we have not done it as yet. But it is something that we can pursue.

Mr KOCH — I would have thought that if we are getting codes of practice up, it would be better to not have a heap of islands, as in the LGAs, and that it would be far better to have one code that was applicable across the metropolitan area, and into regional Victoria for that matter.

Mr HONDRAKIS — Yes, I think that is the — —

The CHAIR — I would actually extend it to having some sort of a national code, because most likely there will be a lot of tourists who come into Victoria and they might have totally different practices in terms of their parking and signage. It could be totally different to ours. I think we should start from home — yes, Victoria.

Mr KOCH — To get it off the ground.

The CHAIR — But, yes, nationally.

Mr KOCH — Here we see a situation where we have three or four standards already running.

Mr HONDRAKIS — And things are very, very different. We think that is actually quite useful. Pedestrian walkways are something we should be looking at. We spoke about give-way control, and separate pricings or some form of provision for pedestrians in crossing some of these aisles would be beneficial, as well as landscaping and lighting.

One other aspect we have not really spoken about is that generally when you look at all these standards it is about maximising the number of spaces. What tends to happen is that you can end up with some fairly narrow parking bays and when you are reversing out you can have some fairly narrow aisle widths. We know that it applies to this sort of a standard, but maybe we should be possibly a little bit more generous when we have these high-turnover car parks. The bays could be a little bit wider so that if you have a shopping trolley or what have you, you can fully open your door and that type of thing. Also what it tends to do is that if you are reversing, you have less tendency to back into someone who is parked opposite you, and less tendency to sideswipe someone parked next to you. Maybe we should start thinking about making
them a little bit more generous, particularly for these high-turnover car parks where there is a lot of movement happening all the time, rather than looking at it and saying, ‘This is the area we have got; this is what we can do; this is our maximum’. Maybe let us look at that as well.

**Mr TILLEY** — Jim, on the 188 car parks in the city of Boroondara, are all of them council, or are there any private operators?

**Mr HONDRAKIS** — We do have some private car parks, and we have enforcement agreements with those car parks. They tend to be the bigger ones like Safeway and Target. We also have a Safeway in Hawthorn. But we do not have too many — not like, say, the city of Stonnington. But we do have those private car parks.

**Mr TILLEY** — What would be the ratio of council car parks to private operators, of those 188 that you have mentioned here?

**Mr HONDRAKIS** — It is a very difficult question. Look, probably 10 per cent. But I am talking about the main private car parks. Obviously there would be a lot of smaller private car parks for smaller-type offices. The ones that would be accessible to the general public are, I would say, probably in the order of 20.

**Mr TILLEY** — Would be private?

**Mr HONDRAKIS** — Private, yes.

**Mr TILLEY** — So by and large the Boroondara experience is that most of them would be council car parks?

**Mr HONDRAKIS** — Correct, under the control of council. Jason raised a question regarding asset management or how we maintain them. What we do is that every year we do a risk audit of all our car parks and if there are any specific issues requiring immediate attention, they are addressed within a very short time frame. We also do a condition rating of all our car parks. Twenty per cent are done each year. They tend to focus on the bigger scale sorts of improvements — it could be resheeting, it could be redoing all the lighting, all the landscaping, all the footpaths, all the curbs and channels. So we have an ongoing program to upgrade our car parks. When we do upgrade them we do not generally replace like for like. There are a lot of car parks that are fairly old and the standards were very different 20 years ago, so it is an opportunity to bring them up to the current standards. We look at that as well.

**The CHAIR** — Very good; thank you.

**Mr HONDRAKIS** — Thank you for your time. Thank you very much.

**Mr TILLEY** — Thank you, Jim.

Witness withdrew.