ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IN CAR PARKS

Melbourne — 14 September 2009

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Mr C. Tsotsoros, assistant director, planning systems management, and
Ms L. Harrop, urban designer unit, urban development, Department of Planning and Community Development.
The CHAIR — Thank you for being here this afternoon to assist the committee’s inquiry into pedestrian safety in car parks. As you can see today’s proceedings are being recorded by Hansard, and you will be provided with a copy of the transcript for you to have a look at and suggest changes, as appropriate. You are protected by parliamentary privilege, but anything you say outside will not be protected by parliamentary privilege. Do you have a presentation today?

Mr TSOTSOROS — Yes. I am presenting without any visuals, so I can start.

The CHAIR — If you could just introduce yourself, and then proceed with your presentation? We will ask questions as we go.

Mr TSOTSOROS — Thank you very much. My name is Con Tsotsoros. I am assistant director, planning systems management with the Department of Planning and Community Development. We are custodians of the Victorian planning provisions. I will set the scene, and then let Lyn give the more interesting design issues of car parking.

The first thing to note is that we are responsible for the state content of the Victorian planning provisions. There are two components: there is the state content; and there are the local schedules and variants, and that is where local government has most of the input. I undertook some research before coming here today, and even though it is inferred throughout the scheme, the term ‘pedestrian safety’ only appears once. In clause 19.03 of the Victorian planning provisions in terms of broad-term activity centre planning. It is not a term that is used in relation to car parking even though it is inferred.

Every planning scheme contains the same state content. There is a particular provision on car parking at clause 52.06. We provided that clause as part of this review. We acknowledge that the clause is out of date and subject to review. An advisory committee handed down its report and recommendations to the Department, and I will cover a few of those in the context of pedestrian safety.

Pedestrian safety, is inferred in the ‘Purpose’ of clause 52.06; it is the fourth-last bullet point, which talks about creating a safe environment for users, particularly at night. That is the extent of any reference in that provision. This provision is a combination of prescription versus performance. There is more performance base because, the more prescriptive you become, the more you may lock out some innovation and specific local circumstances.

The next reference is the decision guidelines. Responsible authorities must consider decision guidelines when they are considering applications. If they are not considered, there could be a grounds for review. One of the decision guidelines refers to ‘Local amenity including pedestrian amenity’. It does not necessarily raise pedestrian safety, but there are some crossovers there.

The final reference in the current provisions on page 4 is that they must meet the dimensions and layout of car spaces and access lanes generally in accordance with Australian Standard 2890.1. That is a ‘must consider’ — the responsible authority must consider those.

Mr KOCH — It must consider, Con, but not abide.

Mr TSOTSOROS — Not abide, but if it does not consider it, it could be subject to review at VCAT, if it does not demonstrate it has considered it.

Mr KOCH — That it has considered it but not used it.

Mr TSOTSOROS — Not used it, no. It is not a prescription; it is purely an assessment of performance.

Mr KOCH — Just paying lip service?

Mr TSOTSOROS — The advisory committee has the draft report on the web page, that includes a revised draft provision. We can provide the link and also the provision itself. It has increased the elements to pedestrian safety. One of them is that it is considering waiving or changing the requirements of the scheme, and also there must be regard to local amenity, including pedestrian amenity and the amenity of nearby residential areas, and there is a need to create safe, functional and attractive parking areas. There is another reference towards the end which commences ‘Access ways should’ — and a couple of bullet points follow which refer to the provision for pedestrian movement within and around the parking area and the provision of parking facilities for cyclists and disabled people. So there is some reference there.

The other thing to note is that when assessing an application it does not just give regard to the provision,
clause 52.06; it also has to look at other parts of the scheme, including the state planning policy framework. And the Victorian planning provisions respond to government policy. So if there was more information, more content, in that space in the state planning policy framework, that would be another consideration as part of the responsibility authority’s review of applications. There are also references to clause 19 and the urban design guidelines. There are the Guidelines for Higher Density Residential Development, Activity Centre Design Guidelines, and Safer Design Guidelines for Victoria. These documents have to be considered as part of the overall application, and Lyn will start getting into more details more from a design perspective.

Ms HARROP — Thank you. My name is Lyn Harrop. I work at the DPCD in Urban Development in the Planning and Local Government area. I am an urban designer.

Overheads shown.

Ms HARROP — I developed a short PowerPoint presentation to describe the design guidance that we have produced to support the planning for Victoria. I have copies here of the documents that I will talking a bit about, giving a context and some of the implications of these documents.

The first thing is that in the Victorian Planning Provisions, as Con noted, clause 19.03 headed ‘Design and built form’ has an objective to enhance the ‘livability, diversity, amenity and safety of the public realm’. Car parks are a quasi-public environment generally, and there is a requirement to consider safety in new development to enhance personal safety and property security and make places where people feel safe. This is the overall objective that we are trying to achieve. The clause also refers to three geographic strategies: the Safer Design Guidelines for Victoria, Activity Centre Design Guidelines and the Design Guidelines for Higher Density Residential Development. There is a fourth interim guideline which is not yet cited in the Victorian planning provisions for large format retail premises. I have a copy of that here too.

The main intention of the Safer Design Guidelines, which are the principal and overarching guidelines for designing for safety, is to promote personal safety in terms of preventing harm from person to person. They also address safety from hazards in the environment. In the guidelines Element 7 refers to car parking areas. The principles it is trying to achieve are looking at natural surveillance, which means overlooking of places and making sure that sightlines are clear so that people can see the path in front of them. Lighting is another principle, and so is ‘direct access’, meaning that pedestrians will be inclined to go the shortest path and so designing for that inclination in pedestrians is probably a good idea.

The CHAIR — Lyn, what process will be acted upon to achieve some of the objectives of all of these guidelines? Is there a power of enforcement that you can go down the path of if certain car park owners are not adhering to some of these principles that have been tried to be gained?

Ms HARROP — They are put forward as guidance, because we recognise that the education and understanding by proponents might need to be increased before we go down any path of enforcement. It is best to educate first. These documents open up discussion. They provide examples of how one might achieve that. An objective can be achieved in many ways, but these give exemplar achievements of doing this. The examples can be used by proponents, or proponents can devise their own design responses to achieve objectives and how their proposals demonstrate them, generally in their Site and Context Report or their Urban Context Report, which they are required to do for development proposals. They would be needing to demonstrate that they have considered these objectives and have addressed them, building an argument for their case. That is essentially how Victorian Planning Provisions deal with guiding development rather than a prescriptive notion. At this point in time there is no prescription for pedestrian access except for disability access.

These are the principles that we wish to achieve. Under the principles we have objectives which are more concrete; they are objects. We want to design to maximise natural surveillance and pedestrian visibility. Natural surveillance is being able to see and be seen as a pedestrian in relation to all the activities that might happen in a car park. Some design suggestions that have been put forward are clear sightlines to the car park and within it, that the stairwells are open and transparent, that car parks themselves might have active edges — by that we mean that there are activities occurring around the edges of the car park to give life and again that natural surveillance and a feeling of safety — and also that there is adequate lighting in the car park. That includes into and between the cars for personal safety, to avoid concealment of people with bad intentions.
The other objective is for pedestrian access. The design suggestion to facilitate good pedestrian access is to provide dedicated pedestrian paths in car parks, mark those routes clearly and safely and use light colours to enhance visibility within the car park.

The second design guideline document that informs urban development is the Activity Centre Design Guidelines, which was developed to support the activities centre policy of Melbourne 2030. It assists local government in developing structure planning with strategic planning tools for their activity centre areas. In the guidelines, Element 8 addresses car parking, and the principles there that are related to activity centres are to provide viable parking and to improve pedestrian and cycling safety and amenity. The intention being to support the use of non-motorised modes.

Mr KOCH — Lyn, what is viable car parking? In what context do you use ‘viable’?

Ms HARROP — I think the intention here was both economically and physically viable in that it functions well in terms of amenity but is also an economically viable use of land.

Mr LANGUILLER — I assume that is a picture of a non-viable car park?

Ms HARROP — Indeed, yes.

Mr LANGUILLER — I do not think I would like to back out of it!

Ms HARROP — Yes. We acknowledge that a lot of car parking places, certainly in the metropolitan area, are fairly informal in their design. We try to address the whole gamut of car parking as it is provided from the high end in the multilevel car parking, as you saw earlier, down to the realistic situation of a train station commuter car park.

Mr KOCH — In saying that, on the second point — improved pedestrian cycling safety and amenity — are we encouraging cycling within car parks?

Ms HARROP — We are encouraging the safe movement of both pedestrians and cyclists.

Mr KOCH — On foot or on pedal?

Ms HARROP — Both. Generally shared paths, but each case would have to be assessed on its own merits to see if it was safe and practical.

Mr KOCH — I would have thought that cyclists would be on foot in a car park environment.

Ms HARROP — It is quite possible. That might be the best option, and that is often the case: you would find signage advising cyclists to dismount and walk their bicycles. Nevertheless I would say yes, you are right; this is an example of a less than satisfactory car park, but it is certainly an example of what we might expect. As you can see, there is no specific catering for pedestrian movement short of walking along the traffic lanes.

Mr KOCH — Lyn, these are guidelines.

Ms HARROP — Yes.

Mr KOCH — There is a bit of a conflict here: what are we meaning and what is the purpose behind all this, or are we just writing something down for something’s sake? If these are going to be guidelines, we have either got pedestrians riding bikes in there or we have not.

Ms HARROP — We should. In the guidelines we used examples of things that are less than satisfactory and how they might be improved. For brevity I used one that was clearly provocative.

One activity centre objective is to ensure safety and amenity in and around off-street parking. This is an example in a well-managed car parking environment — clearly marked. To support the objective the design suggestions are to provide: direct pedestrian links; footpaths around the car park; spaces being well lit; again, surround with active fronts; and avoid conflict with parking and pedestrian routes.

In the Interim Design Guidelines for Large Format Retail Premises some indicative sketches have been included. This is mainly for big-box warehouse-type developments.
Here we try to encourage a really good parking environment, because these types of buildings generally have car-based access, but within the car park to provide good pedestrian amenity once the people have parked — again, generally to put the parking at the side or the rear with active street frontages on to it, and again to separate the pedestrian access ways from the vehicle paths, as you can see, around the edges an access way carrying pedestrians through the middle of the car park.

Generally each guideline is saying the same story. They are reinforcing the same issues.

To go into more detail into the context that Con presented, the Victorian Planning Provisions’ Clause 52.06 on car parking. Its decision guidelines for design and construction refer to the design that is generally in accordance with the Australian Standard AS2890.1 parking facilities Part 1 off-street parking. When you investigate this particular Standard it says that its scope is the safe movement and storage of cars within the facility, the safe pedestrian crossings of the busy circulation routes, and pedestrian egress and access from the venue to the wider urban environment. Both the building code of Australia and the Australian Standard are silent on specific guidance for accommodating pedestrian movement through the car park areas.

Mr LEANE — Is that because it is not a planning issue? Is it more a road safety issue? Is it more a road issue?

Ms HARROP — It is probably because it was a grey area. The Australian Standard is a very technical document, with dimensions, curves and slopes for the movement of cars, and the safe movement of cars past one another and in and out of the building. It does address pedestrians as moving across a vehicle way, and moving from the outside of the establishment to the inside of it — that those entrances should be separated. There is little specifically on providing for pedestrian movement. Once one has parked one’s car and moved towards the destination that you want, does not specifically talk about that. My investigations through the rest of the Australian standards could not find anything that addressed that particular gap.

Mr LEANE — That is interesting.

Ms HARROP — That concludes my presentation.

Mr KOCH — Lyn, the advisory committee considered 75 public submissions, with a final report being due in January 2008. Has that been published?

Mr TSOTSOROS — No, it is yet to be released.

Mr KOCH — Yet to be released? When is it likely to be released?

Mr TSOTSOROS — We have had a few setbacks with it, because we were trying — —

Mr KOCH — That was 18 months ago.

Mr TSOTSOROS — We tried to align it with the new Activity Centre zone, which was gazetted this week, and the car parking provision with the report will be released shortly.

Mr KOCH — A time frame, Con?

Mr TSOTSOROS — I would be guesstimating here, because it is out of my hands — approximately four weeks, with a six-week familiarisation period. Because there are a number of changes which are quite significant, we want the industry to absorb the changes before we gazette them. It is four weeks roughly before they are announced, and about six weeks before they are gazetted.

Mr KOCH — Could I make a request that the committee be supplied with the report when it is released?

Mr TSOTSOROS — Yes.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your presentation.

Witnesses withdrew.