ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Discuss Pedestrian Safety in Car Parks

Sydney — 5 August 2009

Members

Mr J. Eren
Mr S. Leane

Mr B. Tilley
Mr P. Weller

Chair—Mr J. Eren

Witness

Ms A. Morphett, senior policy Advisor Road Safety, NRMA Motoring and Services
CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

Ms MORPHEET—My name is Anne Morphett. I'm the Senior Policy Advisor in Road Safety for NRMA Motoring & Services. We comprise two million members in New South Wales and the ACT and we've an 85 year old history in road advocacy and road safety.

I do need to distinguish ourselves from the NRMA Insurance because we are two separate organisations. Slightly different in the way in which the RACV is constructed.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee and because of my expertise in New South Wales and the situation in New South Wales, I won't cover some of the standards and the regulatory frameworks of Victoria, but rather I'm going to address some of the practical applications covered under the terms of reference and I'm happy to take questions at any time.

One of the reasons that I was interested in speaking to the committee is that there are so many similar things for New South Wales with crashes in carparks and off street areas as there are in Victoria.

I did have a look at the TAC's submission and the RACV submission and I see that they've raised the submission of data collection and the problem of it not being collated in one place.

We have the same problem. Our road authority captures all public road data and is very efficient with that data, but it misses incidents in driveways. So children killed or injured in driveways - which are tragic incidents but not uncommon. We also know that it's more anecdotal than accurate in terms of data in carparks and off road areas.

We share those concerns and support the recommendations of developing a system of recording that data. Like the number, the severity of the injuries and obviously the fatalities, because we believe that we then provide an opportunity to be more strategic in looking at initiatives.

One of the contributing factors, obviously the crashes involving cars and pedestrians, is what we see as the lack of development in a pedestrian movement plan for shopping areas and our position is that we'd suggest that a developer put a pedestrian movement plan in. So not just what they're required to do at the moment, but looking at access and issues, both for entering and the exits, and more of the infrastructure, taking into consideration the pedestrians' focus, which isn't necessarily the logic that the developer and planner have in their minds.

In some ways it's less structured but works on the human behaviour, which is not necessarily logical. We know that quite a lot of the incidents seem to be because a driver or pedestrian leaves their vehicle and then decides to walk down the ramp that's designed for vehicles, because it's nearest to the point that they want to access, rather than it's the correct way. We think that a movement plan at an early stage in new developments would help.

We also believe that it is important to assist developers with some of that information. So rather than let incidents occur, have a more preventative approach.

One of the areas that I'm involved in is cover of older drivers and older road users, as well as young children, parents with young children. They're two of the key groups that are often involved in pedestrian incidents, both on public roads and in carparks.

With the aging population, it's one of the areas that I'm spending more time in. Not just around the driver licensing but general mobility and access. Some of the things that I want to raise around signage, lighting and use of contrasting materials is particularly relevant for that age group because of the vision changes as you age.
If you're happy, I'll just work through some of the practical applications and if you've got any questions.

Because your terms of reference are so broad, when I was looking at carparks, we have issues from commuter carparks like park and rides, multi-storey versus open outdoor areas, paid versus unpaid, shopping centre carparks like Westfield and Woolworths, and large areas as opposed to small carparks.

Then we have the issue of carparks that are attached to licensed venues. So it's incredibly broad terms of reference. Some of these issues and suggestions that we're making will vary and I guess that's one of the complexities of the issue.

All of them, I think, you could do as a countermeasure in varying degrees. So some of that is around planning and the pedestrian movements. Footpath design and maintenance do seem to be a key issue and that touches on falls prevention, both of those were with young children and certainly for the frail aged when it becomes more serious in terms of the injuries.

Lighting and signage near the exit areas of carparks, particularly those that are licensed venues where there may be intoxicated pedestrians or drivers deciding whether or not they're going to drive or leave the keys behind. We know that it's also an issue for passing drivers. So drivers who aren't necessarily in the carpark, but people may be leaving the shopping centre or licensed venues.

What we also found in work undertaken, looking at particularly commuter carparks, is that lighting has a big part to do with both the safety and security aspect. So the willingness of people to use those carparks is affected but also in terms of avoiding incidents of cars striking pedestrians, we know that part of the time they're very dark, they're underground, they're not instructed to put their lights on, and again you can't assume common sense with drivers.

We think that there's a role to play for the managers of carparks to put signage in to remind drivers it would be better for them if they put their lights on.

One of the other issues affecting road tunnels in New South Wales, artificial lighting intensity at the entrance and exits of those tunnels is enhanced in that transition if you're driving out of a dark tunnel into a bright light.

The same issue occurs when you're driving out of a multi-storey dark carpark and you're driving out into a bright sunlit street. You have transition issues so that's another area that could be investigated. We know that contrasting vision is even more pronounced for those 65 plus where the ability for the eye to adjust is occasionally severely affected.

Having previously discussed this, we are concerned with line of sight near exits and entry points of carparks and it is one of the points we agreed with the Pedestrian Council of Australia.

We believe that standing advertising on footpaths in those areas isn't appropriate and it provides both a distraction to the drivers but also often blocks lines of sight. We believe that that should, where possible, be avoided.

We also believe that in large carparks there is a need for separation of pedestrians from vehicles, and where there are particularly large carparks it may be possible to have separations through construction, either in the form of bollards, guard rails or wheel stops. But in smaller carparks, the separation can be made by clearly linemarking so that drivers want to distinguish where pedestrians may be walking.

We also would like to note that where carparks are outdoor and they're open after dark, there needs to be not only improved lighting so that the drivers can see the pedestrians but linemarking there should include high visibility beading. Particularly marking again areas where pedestrians are likely to cross.

In terms of the signage, my colleague has noted there is no requirement in the Australian Standard to use
proper pedestrian crossing signs, and even if marked crossings are in car parks, they don't have the same legal standing as those on public roads. Yet these signs can help to provide consistency for road users. I think that also was raised by one of the other people. We would support that.

The Australian Standard for off street carparks AS289.1-2004, Parking Facilities, this is about the wheel stops, and although it's noted that as a tripping hazard for pedestrians resurfaced in a colour contrasting with their surroundings which would reduce prevention. There are not many manufacturers of concrete wheel stops but they haven't seemed to be encouraged to provide other colours of concrete and the carpark owners aren't using, in many instances - I know in New South Wales and from what I gather anecdotally in Victoria - they're not using the high contrasting material.

This is an issue for us at the moment because it was brought home, particularly where we've been concerned with this and we've been talking about it with a lot of the work we're doing with our older members, but one of my colleagues' young son fell over it the other day and snapped his femur and it was again in a public carpark. Just that grey concrete on grey surface and it did result in quite a nasty injury.

Fortunately they bounce back at that stage, he's three, but if it had an older person with a fractured femur, fractured hip or pelvis, it could be a life changing experience.

**Mr Weller**—Does the NRMA have any statistics on how many of those events are in carparks in New South Wales?

**Ms Morphett**—No, this again is the data. We heard about it anecdotally because it was one of the team's son's who fell over, but we do hear from people who raise their concern.

Like a lot of these things where there isn't accurate data, we hear about things. We also hear about a lot of these near misses and we observe a lot of near misses. In terms of trying to develop counter measures to avoid real incidents, at the moment we're like Victoria, we're not sure how many incidents occur.

I guess nobody has actually done an analysis of claims to each of the insurance companies. Whether it falls within the Motor Accident Authority or not, it's a complex area and there isn't enough data.

What we're looking at as an organisation is are there ways in which we can improve the understanding of the developers and carpark owners? Can we raise awareness of drivers?

It's actually much more difficult to change human behaviour than it is to do an engineering piece of work. Human behaviour is my area of expertise. It's much harder than when I'm working with engineers and say if you put two rows of tape on here, someone's less likely to fall over it, they try to tell people to avoid this. Some of that sort of stuff, which doesn't work.

The area of human behaviour that we are concerned about, and again it's to avoid incidents rather than to try and count how many incidents are occurring is an area for targeted campaigns. One of the areas that we're involved in is trying to get drivers to understand distracted driving is as dangerous as driving drunk or driving fatigue.

It's currently one of the hard nuts to crack because people want to use their technology and in shopping centres, particularly in shopping centres and the commuter carparks, people are focused on getting a car spot so they're looking elsewhere, they're not looking out for pedestrians. They're in a hurry to go shopping and thinking about their shopping list or racing for their train or tram or bus. They're not focusing on that there are very vulnerable road users sharing that space because these are shared spaces.

I think drivers see them as shared spaces with very few rules. So I think their attention span is less focused when they go off a public road. I don't think that's about enforcement, I think it's just a shift in their concentration.
Mr LEANE—We've had this really all day about the shared spaces. Do you think that it would help if carparks, especially ones that service shopping centres and places where you will have elderly and young people, do you think it would be good that there was some sort of regulation that actually deemed those carparks as shared spaces, similar to having the shared space that's got the 10 K limit and the sign's up and the pedestrians have right of way? Do you think that would be a good thing to implement?

Ms MORPHEE——If it's making the system more complex, not necessarily. It would be good. I always say rather than legislating about everything, trying to get people to understand the risks that they're taking for themselves and the risk to a vulnerable road user. So if we can avoid making legislation, I think that would be better.

That's where I think people put signs up and they change the legislation. We've got really tight legislation about mobile phone use and the police run blitzes regularly, they've booked thousands of drivers, but if you stand on any street corner, you will see in two minutes someone drive by talking on the phone.

I think it is providing education and getting people to understand those risks. So no, I'd be against changing the legislation, if at all possible, and I think there are other ways that you could change behaviour before you resorted to that.

The other area which I think people need targeting and education is technology is really good. The use of reversing sensors and cameras are aids. I don't think people understand they still need to be - technology is to help you, not to replace your senses. It's to be used in addition to the over shoulder head checks and actually pay attention when you get into your vehicle.

I think people stop scanning the road and using the correct driving techniques when they're in a carpark and signage isn't going to change that. I think that's when we really need consistent education so that drivers are aware of that.

Particularly again, small children, where it is reversing incidents where children can't be seen. They are highly vulnerable. They're unpredictable and the parents or carers with two children in a carpark, it's almost impossible to hold two, push a shopping trolley, open the car, get everything in the boot. They're quite stressful environments for people and I think that's how a lot of these incidents occur.

Mr LEANE—Some parents might have three or four kids?

Ms MORPHEE—Each one you add, the more complex the situation. Probably the less ability you have of ensuring that they're all standing beside your car while you're trying to get them into the vehicle. Other drivers need to be aware of that. So for the other drivers, it is understanding that there are vulnerable people in the carpark that you're sharing.

I think in terms of education, they're two of the strongest areas that I'd suggest.

I also think that with people, even if you put the bollards in, fix the signage, do the line markings, you can't always get people to behave in a correct manner. But I think if you make it user friendly in terms of putting the access points across large carparks, where people will save time, it will stop them wanting to walk across the actual roadways.

I think drivers do need, when the carpark is constructed, a lot of the carparks that I use, I observe that drivers want to take the fastest way to the exit so they will weave in and out of parked vehicles, which there is a reason why those bollards are necessary.

The CHAIR—Ann, in your view, reversing into carparks, is that a safer way of parking? Reversing into the park and driving out?

Ms MORPHEE—I think part of the problem we have in New South Wales, and I'm not sure
about you, but they're using absolutely minimum space that they have to because land space is at a premium. The size of the vehicle fleet these days is probably larger than when those guidelines were met.

I have to say there's a lot of people who can't reverse park. Probably a lot of the dings that are in carparks are near misses are because people are trying to concentrate on reverse parking. It would depend where, and we've got mixed parking where some is rear to kerb.

**Mr WELLER**—You've either got to reverse in or reverse out?

**Ms MORPHETT**—You do. I don't know why drivers seem to find it easier to reverse out.

**The CHAIR**—Well you've got to manoeuvre in between two cars reversing in, rather in there’s no space to manoeuvre. You've got to open space to reverse out. It makes it apparently easier if it's on an angle.

**Ms MORPHETT**—It is. There's been a change. Quite a lot of shopping centres now are having, apart from the required parking for people with disability with a wider size parking spot, they're having a little symbol which shows a pram. So for those people with prams they've got wider carpark spaces.

I think with the ageing population it is more of an issue, one of the things we are looking at, there has been a debate about the disability parking scheme. I know in South East Queensland, because I have an elderly father in that part of the world, there is a shortage of spaces, there are so many stickers there is not enough parking spaces and I think with the ageing population looking at large numbers of people who need to open the door of the car all the way in terms of hip and leg movements to swing out, there is no squeezing out as you age for very many people, so I think the width of a car space is an issue because in most city and urban carparks there is not enough space to correctly open the door.

I think that will be something in the future that is more of an issue. They are doing it now for people with prams and certainly to get child restraints and capsules inside and out of the car, you need that.

**The CHAIR**—I am not sure if this has legally been tested but in a case where damage is done to a luxury vehicle, for example, because it is more expensive and costs more to repair and due to the tightness of the carpark spaces, the door is opened and it damages the car. The owner knows who actually did the damage and goes to NRMA and says—My car is damaged. With liability, do NRMA seek to recover costs from the carpark people in terms of trying to say that because your carpark space is so tight that when a door is opened and obviously because of the size of the carparks we find that you are negligent in providing a carpark space that is big enough so that damage does not occur to cars. Has that ever been tested?

**Ms MORPHETT**—Because we are not an insurance company and I don't have very much to do with insurance, I could not answer that question. I would be interested if when you are talking to Westfield or one of the other carparks if they believe they have liability – I don’t know. It is an issue because I know so many times, everyone has the same issue. I have had my car damaged in that way on a number of occasions where someone has just opened their car door, banged mine, damage the door and drive off.

A lot of the time it is carelessness when people are in a hurry and they don’t care and don’t think about it.

**Mr LEANE**—Sometimes it could just be wind, sometimes someone is trying to not to be careless and the wind will catch the door. Westfield did say that they do not believe it is their responsibility.

**Ms MORPHETT**—I think it would be interesting to look at the width of standard cars, the actual size of the cars and how much of the fleet now are large four wheel drives. You see them where they have got maybe 5 or 6 cm on either side of the vehicle near the line.

Someone in my apartment building owns a hummer and it actually comes line to line. If the people next to them happen to be there, they have to get in the back door because there is no space. It is not really the most accessible vehicle, but many of the other sized vehicles are a problem, particularly four wheel drives.
The CHAIR— I ask that question obviously in a legal sense, but it also goes to carpark owners basically putting up signs saying—Enter at own risk and they are not liable for whatever happens in the carpark, whether it is damage to the cars or whether there is a collision between pedestrian and vehicle and obviously then the person that is injured has to seek compensation through Work Cover or the Traffic Accident Commission and I am not sure whether it has ever been tested. We probably need to ask the questions of insurance companies. I know they are pretty ruthless on tracking down who the real culprit is in these sorts of cases and that is why I ask the question.

Mr TILLEY— I was very interested when you were talking about sensors and televisions being just an aid, but getting on to the culture of our driving public, is there a good understanding out there that a driver's licence and the ability to be able to drive on the road is a privilege is not a right.

Ms MORPHETT— Well that is actually the line we have, is that it is a privilege, it is not a right and that people need to take it seriously and be more responsible. I think in Australia we have had a culture that it is a right of passage rather than that it is something that you earn and you need to continue to earn. So not just getting it when you are seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, now with the graduating licensing scheme, but that you continue to earn it.

We do very little in Australia between seventeen and seventy five to address that. I think that that is where we do know we can change the culture of drivers.

Australia has the best record with seatbelts, helmets, RBTs, we do change and certainly drink driving, we have changed that acceptability to being unacceptable. We need to do that with speeding and with driver distraction. I think that is where we need to continue to educate drivers and I think we are not saying don’t focus on younger drivers but we do believe that not enough attention and messages are transmitted to those drivers in between those age brackets.

Mr TILLEY— That is one thing that particularly concerns me, people’s personal system of car control, certainly simple manoeuvres like lane changes, mirrors signal, head check before you do the move and I think that is driven home to young drivers and when they are manoeuvring in carparks and things like that, but it is what happens after people get their driver’s licence, there is nothing in there after a period of time where refresher courses come into the operation of car control.

That is particularly also in carparks, manoeuvring in tight spaces as well, nothing happens.

Ms MORPHETT— Also, it is more courtesy than right of way in a carpark because you have to let people in and out, you need to do manoeuvres that you might not normally do, you need to be more patient because they are not just crossing a road, they might be wheeling a trolley and have a number of children, there are more likely to be people being slow because they are carrying parcels so it is a different road situation than you are actually tested on for young drivers and it is something that people probably do take for granted and they don’t understand the risks.

I think the other thing that we would suggest is that people are more impatient now, they feel more time poor so they take more risks when they are feeling rushed. What we say is you cannot afford to take those chances and particularly with pedestrians because they are so vulnerable.

Mr TILLEY— Is the attitude being the driver of a motor vehicle entering a carpark and all of a sudden becoming a pedestrian. The attitudinal change between driver and pedestrian, what are your thoughts on how we might be able to address that? We are talking about putting traffic treatments, we are talking about putting pedestrian crossings, line markings and things like that, but it is the attitude as well as the visual than the actual physical things we put in the carpark.

Ms MORPHETT— Certainly almost all of our members, they are motorists and drivers, they are also pedestrians. I think it is just in the shopping centre there is this instant change where they are there one
moment and the next they are another so their impatience can be escalated if they have been waiting for a car space and I think part of that frustration would be reduced using some of the Smart technology, so that people know where there are empty bays and they can be directed, so reducing that frustration, because when you have people driving round and around looking for a space, they become more frustrated and I think a greater risk. I think frustration is an enormous risk.

The CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.