

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users

Melbourne—Tuesday 8 August 2023

MEMBERS

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Anthony Cianflone

Wayne Farnham

John Mullahy

Dylan Wight

Jess Wilson

WITNESSES

James Williams, Head of Policy, Social Impact and Corporate Communications, and

Julia Hunter, General Manager, Mobility, Royal Automobile Club of Victoria.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee and our Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

All evidence given today will be recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website.

While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside the hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts and other documents provided to the Committee during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website.

I thought we would start with some introductions, and then we will hand over to you as well. I am Alison Marchant, the Chair, Member for Bellarine.

James WILLIAMS: Good afternoon.

Jess WILSON: Jess Wilson, Member for Kew.

John MULLAHY: John Mullahy, Member for Glen Waverley.

Dylan WIGHT: Dylan Wight, Member for Tarneit.

Wayne FARNHAM: Wayne Farnham, Member for Narracan.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Anthony Cianflone, Member for Pascoe Vale.

James WILLIAMS: Good afternoon. James Williams, Head of Policy at RACV.

Julia HUNTER: And Julia Hunter—General Manager, Mobility, RACV.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Do you have an opening statement you would like to give first?

James WILLIAMS: I do, if I may.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you.

James WILLIAMS: Thank you. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I would like to pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

My name is James Williams, and I am Head of Policy at the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria—the RACV. I am joined by my colleague, General Manager, Mobility, at RACV, Julia Hunter, and we would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before this important Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users.

The RACV represents over 2.2 million members and has a proud history of supporting improved road safety outcomes on behalf of all Victorians. In 2021–22 RACV provided 1.1 million members with motor insurance policies, covered 1.6 million members for emergency roadside assistance, responded to 780,000 emergency roadside assistance callouts and had over 200,000 downloads of Arevo, RACV's journey planning and mobility app for cyclists and motorists.

Protecting vulnerable Victorian road users is at the heart of every decision we make as an organisation. RACV's submission to this Committee is aligned with our Safe System approach to road safety and our four pillars of road safety outcomes—safer roads, safer speeds, safer vehicles and safer people.

While a large majority of our members and customers are motorists, most Victorians are indeed multimodal. Nearly three in four of us use a mixture of car, bike and public transport. Providing commuting choices reduces congestion, improves health, increases affordability and promotes sustainability. It is vital we ensure that transport choice is available to all Victorians.

But how do we encourage greater uptake of active transport? Making people feel confident and informed when travelling will help to allay fears and misconceptions about the safety of Victorian roads. The Victorian Government supports active transport and has a commitment to increasing Victoria's mode share to 25% by 2030. RACV believes it is important that the Government accurately measures its performance to ensure that we are on the right track.

In our submission to this Inquiry, RACV has made 23 recommendations to the Victorian Government, including actions that will directly contribute to improving the confidence and safety of pedestrians, cyclists and active transport users.

The first and perhaps most important step is to improve government collection and sharing of data. Comprehensive data is crucial to reducing our road toll and working towards zero lives lost. We need robust and nuanced data to understand exactly why these collisions are occurring. RACV, along with the Australian Automobile Association, is calling for timely, consistent and open reporting of road safety data. Accurate data will allow us to develop evidence-based policy responses and accurately measure outcomes. There is an opportunity for Victoria to be a leader in the sharing of road safety data.

Secondly, the Government must continue to invest in infrastructure that safely separates motorists from vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and micromobility users, such as e-scooter riders. We need to continue building on the *Victorian Cycling Strategy* and allocate more funds to expand the state cycling network. However, the best infrastructure in the world will not guarantee zero road deaths. Driver behaviours are key, and education and awareness will continue to be integral to safer interactions between motorists and cyclists. RACV wants to see the Victorian Government continue to promote safe driving behaviours, including awareness of the road rules. For example, our surveys indicate that many road users do not understand, or turn a blind eye to, the new portable device laws that seek to reduce driver distraction. Likewise, too many road users do not understand the right-of-way rules between motorists and cyclists, including when both a motorist and a cyclist are turning left at an intersection, a scenario that has resulted in lives being lost.

At RACV we strongly believe in greater funding to develop walking networks that link communities to shops, train stations and tram and bus stops as well as improved road design that reflects best practice safety procedures for pedestrians. We support speed limit reductions on a case-by-case basis where there is strong community engagement and a robust safety case. An evaluation of school speed zones across Victoria is also warranted to ensure 40-kilometre speed zones are consistently introduced or, when it is impractical to do so, that other traffic-calming interventions are implemented to reduce the risk of harm to children. And of course we see the need to embrace future transport options that are developing before our eyes. RACV supports the strengthening of e-scooter safety campaigns that target both share scheme and private e-scooters. Education around rules and behaviours will be vital as we work together to successfully integrate e-scooters into our transport network. RACV also wants to see Victoria take a lead in electrical vehicle safety. This includes support for acoustic vehicle alerting systems that will protect blind and visually impaired pedestrians and more education and resources designed to ensure our safety around electric vehicles.

Finally, I would like to address another vulnerable road user group that is often overlooked. They are our members, customers and staff standing at the side of high-speed roads when a vehicle is broken down and needs to be repaired or towed. I know that all Committee members would agree that everyone should have the right to return home safe from work. In Victoria we have 'slow down, move over' rules that require motorists to slow to 40 kilometres per hour when passing a police vehicle, a fire truck, ambulance or other prescribed vehicle. RACV supports this measure, known as road rule 79A, that is helping keep emergency services workers safe. However, many may not be aware that this same protection is not extended to RACV roadside workers, including roadside assistance providers and many other roadside workers. Many of the roadside dangers that emergency services providers are presented with are similar to those that our members and staff are presented with every day. No-one can feel safe stopped on the side of a freeway as cars race past at 100 kilometres an hour. Every other jurisdiction in Australia has extended road rule 79A to protect roadside workers, and we once again call upon the Victorian Government to consider doing the same.

In closing, RACV would like to see our 23 recommendations adopted to make our roads safer and more accessible. Again, I would like to say thank you for this opportunity to be involved with the Inquiry, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have, with my colleague Julia. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, James, for that. We will open up to questions. I will allow one question—Anthony—to the group. We will work our way along, and we will come back to Anthony if there are any further questions. Jess, I will go to you.

Jess WILSON: Thank you very much. Thank you for that comprehensive presentation and also for your submission. I am keen to dive into the points you make around educational campaigns. Do you have a recommendation for the Government or suggestions as to campaigns that have been run previously that are not in place now for the range of road users—whether that is drivers of motor vehicles, whether that is cyclists or whether that is pedestrians or, dare I say it, e-scooters—and how those programs might be tailored in different educational settings, whether that is in schools or whether it is through obtaining your licence, around how we can better educate people and therefore make sure that road safety is at the top of mind when using our roads?

James WILLIAMS: I think there are numerous ways that we can approach awareness and education for road users—and that is all road users. RACV certainly has a very strong focus at the moment on e-scooter riders and the behaviours that we are seeing on the roads at the moment and the non-compliance with many of the rules. We think that is in part to do with perhaps not necessarily understanding what the rules are, so we are certainly calling on the Government to do more there. In terms of the tools that we have—there are a range of them, and you have outlaid many of them—we certainly defer to the experts, particularly the Transport Accident Commission, in terms of the best way to approach particular personas, or road user groups, as the case may be. We certainly think that driving lessons and what is included in the driving manual are important, and you touched on that. For example, interacting with cyclists is part of the manual, but we would like to see that uplifted and certainly emphasised so that it is front of mind for people learning how to drive.

Jess WILSON: Can I just have one quick follow-up question?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Jess WILSON: Just on when learning to drive, there is a requirement to do a number of hours before you can apply for your probationary licence. Are there certain requirements as part of those hours that you would like to see built out or expanded on—you touched on working with cyclists or driving alongside cyclists—that could help improve that in those early learning experiences when you are on the road?

James WILLIAMS: Absolutely. The key to the graduated licensing system is the 120 hours in and of itself—that you are getting exposed to driving and learning how to drive in different circumstances and times of day. The key really, then, building on that, is driven by the manual and the tests. If we build out the manual and emphasise vulnerable road users and interacting with cyclists, we should expect to see that wash through in terms of the training that people receive both professionally and from mums and dads.

Jess WILSON: Great. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. John.

John MULLAHY: Thanks, Chair. Thanks for your submission and also your statement earlier. You went into data being an issue again. Where are the greatest gaps in the Victorian road safety data, and how could the Victorian Government improve public access to that data?

James WILLIAMS: The Australian Automobile Association is working with all the clubs across Australia to really work through and tease out where the opportunities are across all the jurisdictions. The issue is that every jurisdiction does it differently, and there are gaps. I have prepared a table, and I can tell you where the gaps are. I am happy to table this and share this with you; it is a public submission from the AAA. The first one is AusRAP star ratings. The community does not know how safe our roads are rated by the Department of Transport and Planning. Every main road has a star rating between one and five. We think that should be public information, appreciating that it is always a work in progress and an opportunity to refresh. But that is something that is a real gap in Victoria—and then likewise, the vehicle kilometres travelled by that star rating so that we can appreciate if there are significant roads that are not at least 4 stars. It is an engineering rating, and they have all been rated. It is not public knowledge what those ratings are.

The other things we would like to know are vehicle details linked to specific crashes. We are all familiar with work health and safety and the pyramid of deaths, serious injuries, minor injuries and near misses, and we get

that. We understand that if you look at the trends of near misses, it builds up a picture and you cannot just focus on deaths or serious injuries to understand why a workplace is unsafe. The Government does not collect data on anything beyond serious injuries that are reported via the police. We think there is an opportunity there to collect better data about vehicles that have crashed, so that includes make, model, ANCAP rating for the vehicle itself, its roadworthiness and registration status. We also think there is an opportunity for road user details linked to specific road crashes. Let us build up a picture of the age, the sex, the experience and the licence type of the person involved in the crash—likewise, injury outcomes linked to specific crashes. If it is a death or a serious injury, we have some degree of information about it, but it is that next level down—and that includes road user type as well as severity of injury—to really improve our understanding of the data and therefore the evidence base for future policy development.

John MULLAHY: Excellent. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Dylan, can I just jump in there just to keep building on that? What would that look like in terms of—we heard from the Commissioner about police resources and not being called out to every event, those things. Would it be like a self-reporting-type—like a login on an app? Or could I jump on a website and say these are the particulars, I have been involved in something or I have seen something? Is that something that you are kind of describing?

James WILLIAMS: It could be innovative in that way. It could start simply as how it is treated at the hospital and admissions. So that is the first step—and then also looking at certainly being able to self-report or indeed, if there is any opportunity for any touchpoints, that there is an easy way that we can then collect that data. But also, for example, the towing industry would also have information that could be fed through. So it does not have to just be the individual involved, particularly when there is the perception or potential concern that there is fault at stake.

Julia HUNTER: James, can I just add to that? The other thing that will increasingly be available over time is telematics data that would help to inform that. So as car technology improves, that will be another source of that information.

The CHAIR: Okay. Sorry, Dylan, I will go to you.

Dylan WIGHT: No worries. Thanks, Chair. Thanks so much for your submission, and thanks, James, for your opening remarks. My question goes to infrastructure—we love a little bit of transport infrastructure in the Labor Party. Your submission supports infrastructure that separates car users and vulnerable road users. Can you give some best practice examples of how to do that both on major infrastructure—we are obviously not going to see cyclists using things like the West Gate Tunnel, or I hope not, anyway—and some examples of some more significant pieces of infrastructure but also some examples of how we can do that in terms of best practice in growing suburbs like Tarneit, in new estates, in maybe old PSPs that did not include the infrastructure that perhaps it should have?

James WILLIAMS: Well, I might start, and then I will hand over to Julia. I mean, certainly from our perspective what we have seen in the past is a tendency to be opportunistic about protected cycling infrastructure and where you put it. In other words, you are building a freeway, and you will put in cycling infrastructure because you are building the freeway. The first point I would probably make is to put the infrastructure, the corridors, where people want them and would use them—and that is probably a good opportunity to pass over to Julia in terms of the corridor approach.

Julia HUNTER: Thank you. And thank you for the question. When we talk about ‘separated’, to be clear, we are talking about separate bike path infrastructure or we are talking about lanes that have a hard, you know, concrete barrier or the like that is physically separating our cyclists—and our e-scooter riders now—from our motorists. I would draw your attention to the work we have done, which is publicly available, on strategic cycling corridors, which talks to the trunk routes that could be developed, predominantly focused on pathways to get people safely from inner suburbs into inner Melbourne. That exists as a document of reference, but that is in the context of: if you can give people something within the vicinity of their home that lets them get to a safe, segregated, separated cycling infrastructure, that will make them feel safer. And we know that the majority of Victorians fall into ‘We’d like to ride more, but we don’t feel confident,’ and separated bike lane infrastructure is the main thing that research points to increasing that confidence. So that is a solve for the metro area.

Now, your question about areas such as Tarneit: where you have got the opportunity for more of a greenfield perspective, design it in. Consider the infrastructure at the design phase in terms of what will be needed to help all vulnerable road users as well as motorists get around safely. From a retrofitting perspective it is a little bit more complicated, but I see the ask would be that the information is provided to local council such that they know how to best design that back in.

Dylan WIGHT: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Wayne.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thanks, Chair. Thank you for submission and the wonderful work that the RACV does too. We know you work very hard. My question—and it is a thought I have been having after we have heard quite a few submissions today—is on one of our most vulnerable groups of road users, 18- to 25-year-olds. Beyond the 120 hours they do on their learners permit, do you feel as though more education could be done at the secondary school level? Let us use ‘Prevention is better than cure’. What are your thoughts on that?

James WILLIAMS: RACV runs a safe school program. We are in the schools, teaching primary school students—grade 6 or year 6 students—about road safety and being safe on the roads. So we think certainly it has to be part of the intervention and the response to road safety, and there is definitely an opportunity there. We cannot get to every school, and we are oversubscribed. There is certainly an opportunity there for government to target learners—those that are learning to drive—on the best way to drive safely and around vulnerable road users. Did you want to add to that?

Julia HUNTER: No.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thanks.

The CHAIR: Anthony.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you. Thanks for the submission and thanks for appearing. You said something in your opening remarks that sort of struck me, which I just want to turn you back to, which was that the best infrastructure in the world will not lead to or guarantee zero road deaths. You said words to that effect. Of course at a state level, the State Government has got the road safety strategy, which looks to halve the road toll by 2030 and aims for zero by 2050. Going back to your comments, putting infrastructure aside, what is it, in the RACV’s point of view, that we should really be looking at and focusing on as a committee to really improve driver behaviour and reduce driver aggression, speeding and distractions and just improve overall driver behaviour that supports vulnerable road users?

James WILLIAMS: It is a very good question, and it really goes to the heart of when we talk about the safe systems approach. There are these four pillars in road safety, and you cannot look at just one of them. You really have to look at all four, appreciating that one of them is really a Commonwealth domain, which is safer vehicles—at least new vehicles. But even then, the Victorian Government is responsible for in-vehicle standards, so there is still space there for the Victorian Government as well. It is safe roads. And yes, you are right, absolutely, safe roads are not going to achieve zero lives lost. It is safer drivers that we think is the next one that really needs a lot of attention. This Inquiry appears to be based off the post-pandemic world that we are now in. We are seeing a lot of different driving patterns to what we saw prior to COVID, and certainly while we see that anecdotally, as you would see it, we do not have the evidence. So really this is an opportunity, we think, to start building that picture and collecting the data so that we can make better policy decisions about how to tackle this.

Going back to your point earlier around education campaigns: what are the personas, where are the risks and who are the cohorts that we need to target so we can then fashion the best campaign to reach those people? The great example is the VISTA campaign. We collect travel data to understand when people are travelling and how, and we think that is probably overdue. This is a great opportunity for us to really get a better insight into travel behaviours, and the best organisation in Victoria to do that is probably the Victorian Government.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will just finish the session with one question about emerging technologies that either may be in our cars or even for cyclists or other sort of modes of transport. Are you seeing anything that may start emerging that will help us in this space of safety?

James WILLIAMS: We are very supportive of technologies that can certainly assist with vulnerable road users. I know earlier there was a discussion about heavy vehicles and the use of technologies to identify or be able to detect cyclists alongside vehicles. I think that is probably the next. We have just had the reversing aids technology successfully established in Australia. That seems to be one of the key pieces of technology that is likely to be the next cab off the rank. Did you have anything to add on that, Julia?

Julia HUNTER: Just to support that point, I think it will be of no surprise to anyone that newer cars tend to have technology in them that has been better adapted to identifying threats or obstructions. It would be, I think, worthwhile government looking at opportunities to increase funding for the telematics data that can be put into vehicles that would enable things like the detection of vulnerable road users and help to prevent that over time. That is an emerging technology.

James WILLIAMS: We have just looked at some data on vehicles by electorate. In your electorate of Bellarine, Chair, the number one vehicle is the Holden Commodore. The second is the Ford Falcon, and the third is the Toyota Corolla. The Holden Commodore and the Ford Falcon they are not making any more, so there is a long tail of vehicles out there. People are keeping their cars for a long time—an average of 10 years at least. I can share with you what all your cars are in your electorates. It is quite interesting. It is quite varied.

Jess WILSON: Can you table that now?

Wayne FARNHAM: Can I ask a question, Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, sure.

Wayne FARNHAM: I just want your thoughts. I know in New South Wales a car of a certain age has to be re-roadworthied before it can be registered again. Do you think Victoria should go down that model?

James WILLIAMS: The issue in New South Wales is that they have never been able to build an evidence base to support the regulatory or safety outcome behind the annual roadworthy test. So at this stage, no.

Wayne FARNHAM: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Interesting.

Jess WILSON: Just going to the point earlier about road rule 79A not being extended to roadside workers but in every other jurisdiction it is, do you have a sense of why that is not occurring in Victoria? I know we have had campaigns. I can picture the advertisements where you see people stepping out of the car on a freeway and the awful circumstances that might occur if you are not concentrating. Given we have had those campaigns about the dangers of being on the side of a road—we have probably all run out of petrol or needed our flat tyre changed and called the RACV, and you have got a very, very impressive brand name—why isn't that the case in Victoria?

James WILLIAMS: I think it is simply because the way we approached it was in terms of a regulatory practice. It was just based on the colour of the lights. It was red lights or blue lights flashing, and they have a regulatory purpose rather than the action of being by the roadside. I think that is how they came to it. And we are just saying it is about the safety of people on the side of the road, not the regulatory purpose for which it was developed.

Jess WILSON: And does it extend to EastLink or CityLink? They have their own vehicles now.

James WILLIAMS: It does now.

Jess WILSON: Okay.

James WILLIAMS: So the VicRoads vehicles, for example—the magenta lights—yes.

Jess WILSON: Yes. Okay.

The CHAIR: I will open up. We have a few minutes if there are other questions.

Dylan WIGHT: Sorry, just to clarify that: so that rule that is in place for police officers, paramedics and firefighters, with a 40-kilometre limit driving past—that extends to certain vehicles on EastLink et cetera as well?

James WILLIAMS: It refers to response vehicles that the Government has. So that would include CityLink.

Jess WILSON: They often have the '40' actually on the cars.

James WILLIAMS: So, yes, we do feel it is a gap.

Jess WILSON: Yes.

Wayne FARNHAM: I have got a quick one, if that is okay.

The CHAIR: Yes, you have 1 minute, Wayne.

Wayne FARNHAM: Your earlier mention about EV safety and acoustics around them—can you expand on that please?

James WILLIAMS: There has been a lot of work done at an international level for standards for EVs. At a certain speed EVs are practically silent. It is not at high speeds; it is just at up to about 30 kilometres per hour, but I would have to check. There is the development at an international level of standards to create a noise that alerts blind or visually impaired and, dare I say, even pedestrians that rely on listening to know that there is a car coming. The Commonwealth Government is looking at that at the moment, and the Australian Automobile Association with us are supporting the development of that AVAS technology.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I think we are at time, so that was perfect. Thank you so much for your time today presenting and for your submission. It is very much appreciated by this Committee. Thanks for answering our questions.

Witnesses withdrew.