

# 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**

Zoe Stewart, Program Coordinator, and

Laura Kemp, Program Manager, Fit to Drive Foundation.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearing for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's 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 is being 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 this 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 will do a quick introduction, and then we will hand over to you. I am Alison Marchant, the Member for Bellarine.

**Zoe STEWART:** Pleased to meet you.

**Jess WILSON:** Jess Wilson, Member for Kew.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Dylan Wight, Member for Tarneit.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Wayne Farnham, Member for Narracan.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Anthony Cianflone, Member for Pascoe Vale.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for being here today. Do you have opening statements or things you would like to talk about first before we head to questions?

**Zoe STEWART:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. That will be great.

**Laura KEMP:** Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Committee, for having Zoe and me here to represent Fit to Drive and to also have an opportunity to represent a lot of the young people that we go out and speak to in secondary schools for the majority of the school terms. We are also really appreciative of being able to report on a lot of the findings that we have had, not just in, during and post COVID but also as a reflection of what we were learning prior to that and how that is making a really critical impact on the way that young people are and will be using the roads in the environment now.

My name is Laura. I am the Program Manager at Fit to Drive. I have a background in health promotion and teaching, so besides working as a facilitator I have used a lot of that experience to inform our new programs. We can hopefully give you a little bit of insight into that educational piece today. I will have Zoe introduce herself as well.

**Zoe STEWART:** Hello, everyone. Thank you once again for having us. We really appreciate the opportunity to be here to talk with you, answer some of your questions and contribute to this Inquiry. I am Zoe. I am a Program Coordinator at Fit to Drive. I began working at Fit to Drive during COVID in the online road safety delivery space as a facilitator. Since then I have become part of the coordinating team, which has involved working with a number of stakeholders, including councils and road safety groups as well as Rotary clubs, schools and communities, on delivering our programs and finding ways we can increase safety for young people on the roads. That is it from me, so I suppose we will hand over for questions, if that is okay.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, perfect. Thank you very much. John, we will go to you, as we were up to you before. Let us do it that way.

**John MULLAHY:** Thank you. What are the main challenges young drivers face on the roads, and how do your programs address those challenges?

**Laura KEMP:** Thanks for the question, John. I think some of the main challenges that young people face are some of those key risks to do with distractions and mobile phones, speeding and seatbelts. Then that can

translate into overloading, and I think some of those key risks are also combined with peer pressure and peer group pressure. So one thing that I think is really risky for young people, as opposed to more experienced drivers, is that level of inexperience. So not only do they have less years on the road, they are also then mixing that with peer passengers. They are the biggest challenges that we see young people facing.

**Jess WILSON:** Sorry, when you say ‘overloading’, that means more people in the vehicle than there are seatbelts or seats?

**Laura KEMP:** Yes, correct.

**John MULLAHY:** Great. Thank you.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Thank you, Laura and Zoe, for your submission. My question is just around how many schools you reach. I know you spoke about the fact that you were still able to deliver an online program during COVID, which is amazing. I am just wondering how many schools you are actually able to get out to in person. Is it on an opt-in sort of basis? Do the schools contact you or contact the department to say that they would like to take part in the program?

**Zoe STEWART:** We do have quite a long history of going to schools—since 2014. I believe the number is over 140,000 students that we have reached. I just want to say thank you for your question as well, Dylan. I do appreciate it. So, yes, since 2014 we have reached over 140,000 students. I believe we average about 100 to 120 workshops a year across the state. We can break that down into rural and metro as well, if you would like. The way it works is we do have a lot of schools that are regular bookings, and we do also reach out to schools and councils to see what their interest is in road safety and how we can make that happen. A lot of rural schools do not have the funding support—I am sure there will be questions about that; we do not have the funding support there—so we do look at ways that we can reach rural schools, which does involve reaching out to, as well as councils, Rotary and community groups that can help fund us. Thank you.

**Dylan WIGHT:** No worries.

**Jess WILSON:** So maybe just picking it up there, the educational programs that you offer are paid for by the organisations in which you deliver them, so the schools, the council or whatever it may be. Is that right?

**Zoe STEWART:** Primarily, yes.

**Jess WILSON:** Do you have any support from the State Government in terms of delivery of those programs? I know you work in partnership with Victoria Police and I think Fire Rescue Victoria, but what are some of the broader initiatives, and what would be useful to you to be able to expand your program offering?

**Zoe STEWART:** I will take this one. Thank you for your question, Jess. Historically, we have had support from DTP and VicRoads to deliver the program in an amount per school. It was \$600 for metro and \$800 for rural schools. In 2023 we have had to adapt and pivot our funding model as we no longer have that funding stream. We have been working with councils. Laura has developed the program in response to feedback from industry experts as well as our emergency services partners, teachers and schools to create a program that is most effective and also cost effective for students, so we have been able to reduce the cost per student. However, in terms of what we need for the longevity of the program going forward and long term, it is that kind of overarching support. We work with a lot of councils who really love our program and really want us to be out in their areas. However, a certain amount is allocated to the program, and their having to absorb that additional cost has meant we have been able to reach less students in 2023 as we have been able to go to less schools. So yes, that overarching, long-term support is what could be most ideal for the longevity of the program.

**Jess WILSON:** So your funding model now is primarily based on where you go and deliver educational programs, and they provide that as your revenue. So is it purely through that? There is no public funding?

**Laura KEMP:** No. To add to what Zoe was saying, it used to be, since 2014, through the VicRoads community grants, and then in terms of resourcing for getting even more funding to be able to deliver more workshops—for example, regionally—that came from government and the TAC. During COVID we still had some of that funding to be able to deliver online workshops. Post COVID we continued as well. This year some

of the funding has been redirected, so now that is where we are relying on council funding—so longstanding relationships with councils—and Rotary clubs. And it is also then eating into schools having potentially to pay for or absorb that cost as well. I think what Zoe is trying to say too is that that kind of long-term funding that we did have made it way more accessible, and we can see that in the numbers that we had with funding and without, whereas now it is less accessible. Schools want to do it. We have regional schools that go through really harsh incidents that happen to their students on the road, but it is really not accessible for them when there is no funding from their shire and there is no government funding either. We try and absorb that as well and get on the phone and see what we can muster up to be able to go out there and deliver.

**Jess WILSON:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Wayne.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Thank you. Thank you for your submission. I am a regional MP. I am quite curious—regional driving and metro driving are different. Do you adapt your program for regional drivers? Young regional drivers especially have a lot of challenges, so do you adapt your program to suit regional?

**Laura KEMP:** Absolutely. Pre COVID the program was pretty universal, depending on which area we were delivering it in, and then during COVID, when we went online, it allowed us to take the conversations we were having and use them to tailor programs to the now. So there are conversations where we talk about, ‘Okay, students, what are the risks that you face?’ Things like getting an Uber here—for them, they have got no transport when they need to get home on a night out. They are exposed to unlicensed driving on private property a lot earlier. So now in our new programs we have a specific point of discussion, like a pod, that is 20 minutes as part of the overall program, where we just focus on regional issues, and that is only delivered to regional students. The Victoria Police officers that work with us are from those areas, so when they come out, while they use a pretty standard presentation, we have trained them to be able to emphasise those issues as well, so we make it a lot more relevant for them. We also look at role-playing. And so while people in metro schools might role-play getting on an e-scooter or PTV or speeding, those in regional areas are going to role-play maybe a paddock bomb or they are going to role-play things that are relevant for them.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** That sounds right.

**Laura KEMP:** Or, you know, if they are out at the pub at night, they are going to maybe call Dad—or maybe not, because Dad might be there too—so they are going to have a vehicle that someone drives safely. They are the kinds of holistic learning and educational pieces we are trying to work with them on.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** That is great. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Good question. Anthony.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you. And thanks, Laura and Zoe too, for your submission, for your work and for coming along today. I was just reading through the submission and saw a couple of key stats there. Pre COVID, 64% of young people apparently had attained or applied for their learners permit, but then post pandemic that figure surged to over 75% of young people attaining or applying for their learners permit so that is a big jump there from a lot of young people presumably catching up on those two years. So I guess my question is: in your experience, what are the key areas of road safety behaviour, opportunities and issues that you are seeing as you engage young people in schools who are increasingly getting their learners permits, and through that work how could government or other state entities or non-government entities potentially complement your work to help address those opportunities and issues to improve road safety behaviour for young people as they get their learners and Ps and beyond?

**Zoe STEWART:** Thank you for your question. One thing we are seeing with a lot of young people in schools these days is how COVID affected their ability to learn as well as their ability to access education. We have also taken them off the roads for a couple of years. Students do not learn to drive when they turn 16 and get in the driver’s seat for the first time. Children learn from the time are babies or toddlers watching their parents drive. Taking them out of the situation right before they got their licences has actually contributed to a significant number of students not knowing what the graduated licensing system is to begin with. We had a look at the stats during COVID from our online programs—to your right—which showed that the vast majority

of students did not know what the graduated licensing system was before we taught them throughout that program. That piece has been a significant factor I think from COVID.

Additionally, COVID has taken away a level of socialisation that students had previously, so those formative years of being able to socialise with their peers which may have led to the maturity that led them to be able to speak up in certain situations. We have found a lot of them are less comfortable speaking up, talking to their peers and interacting in group scenarios with their peers. Our behavioural approach is a lot more foundational in some senses in teaching them that level of speaking up. Would you mind repeating the second portion of your question, sorry?

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** It is just basically around and in light of those figures and the increase in the amount of young people applying for their learners and through the young people you are engaging. Notwithstanding your work, what are the opportunities potentially for government, whether it is the TAC or VicRoads or the department of transport or other entities that are in a similar field to yourselves, like Road Safety Australia, RACV and some others that we have heard from and had submissions from? How can everyone else, I guess, help in that regard in the same space that you are helping in? What are the learnings that you have seen that others can also complement and support and help with?

**Zoe STEWART:** Yes, absolutely. We know behaviour is a fundamental part of road safety, but one aspect is not going to change a widespread problem. We are part of the Safe System approach, so we are safe for people. We also need safer roads. We know with a lot of rural crashes potentially people were speeding, but potentially the crash would not have happened as well if the road had been maintained in certain areas. I understand that is a complex problem to fix, but it is what we see and it is what students say in those areas, so safer roads. Safer communities as well—we have community programs. We have the Green Light initiative, which complements our Fit to Drive school program. That is targeting learners as well as the community and how communities can make learners safer. It is a multipronged approach. It is the education piece throughout high school that does teach them stats and facts and what the GLS might be. I know that is being incorporated more into the high school curriculum as well.

**Laura KEMP:** On that too, I was going to say the curriculum piece about TAC. I think holistically and also sustainably if we can have government, so TAC and VicRoads, put in more curriculum that is aligned with road safety, so let us say, physics or even health promotion—students can come up with road safety initiatives—if we have things like that, that is going to be another touchpoint then for them to have a bit more of a think. If we have multiple touchpoints, so we have that in the curriculum, we have a workshop that they do in year 11 as part of a health day, then maybe we have more funding to L2P and we initiate some more community programs, so maybe funding through local government where they could do a community program like Green Light, which is for supervisors and learners, I think things like that are going to help with the knowledge that may have been lost through the increases with the learners. Does that add to what you were going to say?

**Zoe STEWART:** Absolutely, yes. Finally, I would just like to add: safer cars as well. P-platers do not have the ability to buy cars that people can when they have saved up more than a piggy bank's worth of money. Safer cars are a significant aspect of road safety. Crashes can result in serious injuries they might not have if they had had a car that had that aspect. That may come into a legislative sense in how we target how P-platers are using the roads and how we can provide access to safe cars for young people, absolutely.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I have a couple of questions, just quickly. I am addicted to my phone, so I cannot really talk too much about that, but young people obviously are growing up with phones and devices and COVID. Have you seen behaviour changes in that, and how do you tackle distraction from phones?

**Laura KEMP:** I might answer it first, and then I want to hear from Zoe as well because Zoe does a lot of the on-the-ground work. In regard to mobile phones, it is interesting because it is probably the biggest issue, when you ask students, 'What is the one thing that targets your group,' that comes up probably—and speeding. I think COVID has impacted their use of technology. I think it is the quick stuff—it is checking their phone really quickly—which they are probably not aware that they do while they are driving. We do one activity where we look at text messages and notifications from social media and they determine which is the most important to check. It is interesting—and you might be able to speak on this as well—how they think that some

are okay and it is just second nature, so how do we change that behaviour? When we show them some of the TAC campaigns to do with the cameras, it shocks them. We find a lot of the time with behaviour they do not get scared and the students that do do not want to drive. We do not want a scare tactic completely, but we do want to make them go, 'Oh, God. That's probably not worth it. I don't want the fine.' I think maybe things like that—to go, 'No using your phone, even to touch it'—are quite impactful.' I think they are the things that we have got to try and target, and they are the things that we notice in their mobile behaviour that they probably do not think are that bad.

**Zoe STEWART:** Yes, absolutely. And just adding to that, even Victoria Police—obviously we speak to them at workshops a lot and we get their collaboration for our program—have seen it as well. We work with a lot of both proactive police and highway patrol, and that is what they see. Once they identify the problem or see those TAC ads regarding road safety—from there, it is finding the solution, so what are they going to do instead of checking their phone that kind of scratches the itch or potentially does not create the itch, like turning off their phone or pulling over. Sometimes it can be as simple as making those connections. They think if the phone buzzes, answer the phone. If you have a discussion with your peer group—and we facilitate that out—suddenly they have made a lot more pronged connections that make the situation a lot safer and it does not make it any less convenient necessarily.

We know that legislation has been updated to allow students to be able to use their phones a little bit in the car, so they now can use it to set up before they start driving to listen to music. We are continuing to see what happens. We need to update legislation based on our communities. I understand why it has happened. Because that was only the beginning of April, it has been interesting having those conversations with students and seeing where that is going to lead us long term and whether it is going to make it safer because they can access it in some ways or whether it may lead to other directions.

**The CHAIR:** And just finally, advanced driving courses and things once you have got your licence—do you recommend those types of extra hours to get the experience of making decisions on the road?

**Zoe STEWART:** Absolutely. I think anything they can do to further take on the message of road safety is really important. Yesterday we were discussing stopping distances, so 2 seconds—if you are going 100 k's an hour, you travel 50 more metres. That is something we can tell them, and that is something a lot of students will take on board. Students are not going to learn all in one way. We adapt for rural schools, but we additionally adapt for all sorts of schools and alternative schools—we have facilitators who are especially trained in delivery. One student might hear that and think, 'Wow, that's a lot.' One student might see that or be in a car and think, 'Wow, that is a lot of distance.' And it is important to remember that not all students are going to get their licence, so adapting in terms of public transport use and being a passenger is also very important.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Laura KEMP:** I would just add, in terms of best practice research, I know TAC have this data where a lot of those driving courses were potentially maybe glorifying behaviours. But from what you are talking about in terms of stopping distances, if we have more practical driving courses, which I think RACV might still do, where it is quite a controlled environment and I think you are quite literally learning as a new learner—you have got cones and you are more actually learning how to control a vehicle rather than the risk—I think that is preferable, because like Zoe said, then you have touchpoints. They drive practically and they have education and all of that. I think the stopping distances and practical learning will definitely help.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Thank you very much for your submission and your time today answering our questions. It has been great to get a different perspective actually today. We really enjoyed the conversations. Thank you so much.

**Committee adjourned.**