

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne—Tuesday 22 August 2023

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Anthony Cianflone

Wayne Farnham

John Mullahy

Dylan Wight

Jess Wilson

WITNESSES

Shane Hardingham, Acting Coordinator, Traffic and Transport, Knox City Council;

Daniel Przychodzki, Coordinator, Transport, and

Martin Halden, Coordinator, Strategic Transport, Greater Dandenong City Council;

Rayna Berg, Health Promotion Officer, Melton City Council; and

Bivish Ghimire, Coordinator, Transport and Engineering Development, Hobsons Bay City Council.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the round table 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 will be recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament 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 remind Members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise that interference.

Because today this session is a round table format, we will jump straight into a question-and-answer sort of session. If you would like to answer a question that is raised by a Committee member, please just raise your hand on the Zoom function so we can see that, and then I will ask you to respond. There may not be an opportunity for everyone to respond today to every question, so just depending on how we go for time, we will allow two or three speakers before moving on to the next question. But please know if there is anything that is not raised today or if you would like to add further to the conversation, you are more than welcome to provide additional information in writing to the Committee. We would appreciate that if you think there is anything extra.

Thank you all for giving your time today. We really do appreciate it. The Committee has had a couple of hearings in person, and we are doing these online today. We have had really great discussions with a variety of recommendations and ideas, so we really appreciate hearing from you today. Dylan, we did not get to you in the last session, so we might kick it off with the first question from you.

Dylan WIGHT: Sure. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, everybody, for your submissions. My question goes to infrastructure. I am the Member for Tarneit, which is obviously a really fast growing area over the last decade or so, with several different PSPs. What we have found out there is that often pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is not quite what it should be, and that sort of connectivity between the different estates and where people need to get to is not sort of always there. I think we heard that through some of the evidence given by people in the previous round table. It makes it incredibly difficult for active transport to schools, which creates a lot of congestion around pick-up and drop-off times. I am just wondering how councils and state governments can better work together both in planning and funding to make sure that when there is a new planning development proposed, or indeed trying to do it retrospectively, we can better work together to make sure that that infrastructure is there.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Daniel. We might start with you.

Daniel PRZYCHODZKI: Thank you, and thanks for the opportunity to participate today. I guess our concern from Greater Dandenong is that, for example, we had a school, Dandenong North Primary School, grow from 300 students to 900 students without any planning requirements from council at all. There were no additional parking spaces provided for the additional teachers required. If anything, they lost parking onsite because they built more buildings. So I would be saying we would like to have the opportunity to participate in reviewing such proposals from the State, which we are currently exempt from with regard to schools, so we can have this valuable discussion with them to identify these issues that we knew were coming before they occur.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Daniel; much appreciated. Is there anyone else that would like to talk to that question about councils working with state government?

Dylan WIGHT: Can I just say, if there are no other hands up, I would be, for my own benefit, really interested in Melton City Council's perspective on this, given that we are in close proximity and the growth in that council is similar to what it is in Wyndham.

Rayna BERG: Hi, Dylan. Thank you. Melton City Council is unique in its high and rapid growth. We have so many families moving to the area every week. I think something that really impacts us here is the lack of connectivity with public transport services. We have got lots of new estates coming up that are not well connected with public transport—you know, that increase in private vehicle use. We currently have 49 schools

in the municipality, and we have got more coming up every year. Just the resourcing we have at council does not provide us with the opportunity to provide support to the schools in the way of road safety and especially in the way of school crossing supervisors. I know in our submission we highlighted the bill for school crossing supervisors each year is growing, and the State Government contributions are just not keeping up with that. There are a couple of key points there, Dylan. Anything further I am happy to answer.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. Kim, we might head to you.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Thank you so much for that, and good morning, everyone. It is great to have you at our roundtable discussion this morning, and I am really looking forward to the conversations to be had. My question is: what challenges do councils face providing a safe environment for vulnerable road users?

The CHAIR: Shane, thank you.

Shane HARDINGHAM: Thanks for the opportunity to participate in the session today. One of the biggest challenges that we tend to face is the available space within the public realm, such as road reserves and the like. Often we have got competing interests between public transport, pedestrian access, cycling and also moving traffic around, so that tends to be one of our significant challenges. Improving relationships between municipal councils and DTP might be a better way to get some feedback from those parties on a more regular basis.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Shane. Martin.

Martin HALDEN: The issues we face as a local government are probably the state arterial roads as far as the network goes. I think in Greater Dandenong the last 12 vulnerable fatalities have all been on arterial roads, where the speeds are higher. Obviously if we are trying to create a network of pedestrian and cycling routes to get through, you are going to come to arterial roads and not be able to cross them. So really probably getting the funding towards the arterial roads, where the accidents are happening, not the council-managed roads, is the issue we are having, because we cannot create a comprehensive network unless those arterial road issues are dealt with, and the funding for arterial road infrastructure just seems to be lacking.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Rayna.

Rayna BERG: Hi. Just seconding I guess what Martin highlighted about the arterial roads, our highways out here are not up to proper freeway standard, and that just creates a higher level of congestion. Again, as Martin said, better collaboration on improving those roads, rather than just focusing on council-managed roads, would be amazing, and it would decrease the time that many of our community members sit in traffic on their way home from work, decreasing fatigue, decreasing road degradation and further minimising the risk to vulnerable road users because of all those factors.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. Jess, we will head to you for the next question.

Jess WILSON: Thanks so much, Chair, and thank you, everyone, for appearing today and for your submissions. I suppose one thing we have heard from witnesses over the past couple of hearings is around the role of education programs and the role that council can play in that as well. We heard from Fit to Drive previously and a number of other programs. I am interested in your views and your experience with these programs, how there might be opportunity to expand those programs and what the role of council is working in partnership with the State Government, whether that is a funding role or a design role. How do we best design these programs going forward?

The CHAIR: Rayna, we will go to you. Thank you.

Rayna BERG: Thank you. Yes, having worked in the education space quite a bit in road safety, I can definitely attest to the fact that programs such as Fit to Drive that are delivered in our local schools are a really amazing way to reach the target audience, and that is young drivers or drivers that are preparing to get their licences. As a council we try and develop programs outside of school settings, and they are just not as successful and they just do not get the engagement or the response that programs such as Fit to Drive can give us. And I am sure a lot of submissions highlighted the reduction in funding that came from the VicRoads community grants. That that was no longer in there really made an impact on schools wanting to deliver it. They are quite hesitant because they are quite worried about finding that extra funding. I think a better

collaboration with the Department of Education and the Department of Transport to prioritise road traffic education in schools—and in that comes education about active travel for primary schools. As we know, increased active travel will reduce a lot of the road safety issues we face with pick-up and drop-off zones and all that. So yes, it is really important, and I guess we are quite an under-resourced council with the amount of schools and the amount of people in our municipality. It is very resource intensive for us to deliver those programs, so to have more support would be invaluable.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Daniel.

Daniel PRZYCHODZKI: Yes, just to support what Rayna just said, we have also seen a drop-off in state government funding to support these programs. It used to be a three-way share between council, state and the school. It is now 50–50 between the school and the council, and some schools have had to drop off as a result because they just do not have the budgets to be able to run these programs, which is very unfortunate.

And just as an additional point, if I may, probably not really to the question that was asked, Greater Dandenong is the most multicultural municipality in Australia. We have an issue—a very significant issue—with new arrivals and access to information about our licensing systems and so forth. They arrive from whatever countries they do and they do not understand our systems in place, and we think the State has a much broader or stronger role to play in making sure they get access to the appropriate resources so they can drive around licensed and registered and so forth legally. Police have estimated out here, in our discussions with them, that they expect about 40%, conservatively, of our drivers in Greater Dandenong are potentially unlicensed—and that is a conservative estimate.

The CHAIR: Daniel, do you mind if I jump in there just to add to that? Does the council provide additional education programs, knowing that cohort that you have?

Daniel PRZYCHODZKI: Yes, we do.

The CHAIR: What does it look like?

Daniel PRZYCHODZKI: We partner with RoadSafe South East—RSE, for short, is the acronym—and they assist us with delivering programs to the communities. Martin might be able to add a bit more to that as well, if he wishes.

The CHAIR: Yes, Martin has got his hand up. Thanks, Martin.

Martin HALDEN: Yes, I can jump in. There is a sometimes state subsidised program for our new arrivals, and it becomes a far harder spot than schools to actually get at a target audience. The only way to get guaranteed uptake is to include things like free lessons or something like that, which makes it a relatively expensive program. So yes, we have run it and we partnered with a few other people around here, but the numbers going through that are—we are not hitting our target audience. When we consulted with the community on a road safety strategy a few years ago, they actually said, ‘Look, education is part of the licensing process.’ Or the police having tools when they do pull somebody over who genuinely does not know or says they do not know about the licensing system—there is no methodology for the police to do anything there or force them into an education program in that space. So we have been tweaking the existing new arrivals programs to try and get something that works here, but we have never had high numbers through. That is probably the key point.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Martin. Jess, do you have a follow-up for that?

Jess WILSON: I do, just really briefly, Chair, thank you. Just in terms of the Fit to Drive program and the drop-off due to funding, how much does it cost if the local council or the school has to pay for it? Do you have a sense of the cost of that? And how many schools in your area used to take up the program and do not take it up anymore?

The CHAIR: Yes, Martin, thank you.

Martin HALDEN: Yes, so it depends a little bit on the number of pupils, but we are talking about maybe a few hundred bucks to \$1,000 per school and council matching the same for some of the larger, more successful sessions. It is not huge numbers of dollars, but it is enough I guess to put a school off.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Anthony, we will head to you for the next question.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thanks, Chair. And just picking up off that topic of the multicultural community, which is sort of what I want to focus on, around your council's experiences and challenges to protect vulnerable road users in the multicultural cohort. The cities of Dandenong, Brimbank, Melton and Hobsons Bay are some of the most multicultural and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Victoria and Australia. So I guess, with that lens on, I really just want to ask, building on what you have already said: what can the Victorian Government do in its capacity to actually target, support and engage that CALD cohort as vulnerable road users? Whether it is as motorists, active transport users or on public transport, what in your view should the priorities be to support those communities?

The CHAIR: Thank you. Rayna.

Rayna BERG: Thanks, Chair. The one thing that comes to mind—and it is something that we have discussed amongst ourselves for some time, and we heard a lot of feedback from the community—is that programs such as L2P only cover certain age groups. They only go to 21 and only very rarely sometimes 23, which really leaves out a very big vulnerable group of maybe new arrivals that do not have their licences, that are seeking to get their licences. It prevents them from accessing that supported driving education time, and that has been a big thing for us, that they do not really have the availability of an education program for the age group that sits outside of that that might be vulnerable migrant or refugee community members. So it is really challenging to get them some driver education if they do not have the support in their family or community networks.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Anthony, do you have any other follow-up from that, or –

Anthony CIANFLONE: That is fine. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Daniel.

Daniel PRZYCHODZKI: Yes, sorry. I just wanted to support everything Rayna just said. I completely agree.

The CHAIR: So maybe, Daniel, can you talk to: is there an age group that you would like to be able to target more?

Daniel PRZYCHODZKI: Well, look, first of all, I would say it is probably women versus men a bit in some of the CALD communities we have, in terms of culturally maybe not being permitted to drive elsewhere, but then when they come into Australia, women are allowed to drive—equal rights and so forth, to be able to do that. So they come in with no experience whatsoever. And then with age groups, it is broad, as Rayna said. It can be adults well beyond 30 years of age, and they lose access or generally do not have access to the existing programs, such as the L2P, which is generally aimed, I guess, at 16- to 20-year-olds.

The CHAIR: Thank you. And I am just acknowledging that we have got Hobsons Bay with us, so thank you so much for being here. Wayne, I might head to you for the next question. Thank you.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, everyone, for your submissions. One thing I would like to talk about is safety around schools, because I think that affects every council, probably, in Victoria, every LGA. What measures should be prioritised to improve safety for students around school drop-off and pick-up times?

The CHAIR: Martin, thank you.

Martin HALDEN: Just to probably say at the top is safety around schools—obviously it is a huge concern for the community. We get an awful lot of requests and things, but it does not necessarily mean that it is actually reflected in the road trauma. The heavy congestion around schools can be a very good thing because it reduces the speeds to a level where really the risk of serious accidents or worse is incredibly low. Around schools, again, it is about the low-speed environment. You are going to achieve that probably in a way with congestion, but education and maybe encouraging a little bit more walking and cycling is always a great thing there. It is a perfect opportunity to train people to do the right thing. We need to educate to isolate the congestion and road safety, because they are very different things around schools—one frustrates people, one

harms people—and they are often competing against each other. That is probably a bit of education that we would love to get to the community a bit more broadly.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Rayna.

Rayna BERG: Thank you. I briefly touched on this earlier, but I think some better direction or engagement from the Department of Education to schools to help the schools prioritise it—on a weekly basis we have requests from schools about needing help with some education or dealing with certain road safety issues or student behaviour or driving behaviour around schools. Often the question is: what is council doing about it? We have run a couple of pilots where we go into the school and we do deliver some education and we try and work with them to improve it, but getting the school to kind of pick up where we leave off is really challenging. Getting the buy-in from the school to make it ongoing—council does not have the resources to deliver education in every single primary school across the municipality, so making it more of a collaborative thing where the school also has some resources to continue that work and not just relying on council's input would be really valuable, and it would create a much more sustainable approach.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Shane.

Shane HARDINGHAM: Something that we are tending to notice at the moment on that congestion front is a little bit particular to schools that actually provide pick-up and drop-off within the school. We seem to notice when that situation exists we get long queues of traffic that extend outside of the local road network into the state arterial network, and there are no road rules that can kind of help in a situation where people might be queueing 100 metres in a queue whilst they are waiting for the school to open their gates to get in to pick up students. Conversely, say, in state government schools, where there is very, very rarely any pick-up opportunity, the parents do tend to, at the very least, I guess, park within the local road network and then walk back to the school to pick up and drop off children, so we do not get quite the same queueing congestion. Certainly it is the same sort of congestion in terms of parking, but in some ways that is easier to manage for a local council rather than the moving traffic. So, yes, I think perhaps education about options other than waiting in a queue to pick up children—more walking to school, even if it means parking a little distance from the school and then walking to pick up the children, would be of assistance.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We have got a few minutes to go. I will throw to John for the next question.

John MULLAHY: Thanks, Chair. I was just considering that we might move to e-scooters. Obviously we have got some trials going on in the inner city and in Ballarat at the moment, and I was just interested with these councils—what infrastructure and policy measures do you think would be needed to help us protect our vulnerable road users?

The CHAIR: Martin. Thank you.

Martin HALDEN: Sorry, I know you had a similar answer in your first session, which I was listening in on. Probably the key thing with e-scooters—there is a huge difference between the managed programs where the vehicles are capped at 25 kilometres an hour or whatever and the fact you can sort of pop into JB Hi-Fi and spend a thousand dollars and get something that goes at 40, 50 or 60 kilometres an hour with no education and no warning. The infrastructure required to actually work within those programs—like those Port Phillip and Melbourne have—is not huge, but we are actually trying to start to retrofit to cater for the far higher speed brought out of 'go into a store and buy one' vehicles. That is incredibly challenging and very, very expensive infrastructure. The policy space is very much 'How do we limit the sale of the devices which are higher speed and not appropriate for the environment?' That is probably the biggest concern, I would say, from a council perspective—dealing with the high speed, not the capped programs.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. And Bivish, I know you have just joined us and are a bit late, but if you have anything to contribute please put up your hand and we will go to you. Anyone else got thoughts on e-scooters? Rayna?

Rayna BERG: Thank you. Yes, we recently have agreed to have an e-scooter trial in Melton and Caroline Springs out here, which I think could be really positive for the community. But our concern is just the general lack of knowledge and awareness about safety and the legislation around them. I think there is often confusion that the same legislation applies for a scooter that does to a pushbike, and that is just not the case. In recognising

that we will have 16-, 17-, 18-year-olds riding these scooters, we really want to protect them and make sure that they know the legalities and the rules around them. I guess just assistance with that messaging and making it a clear and blanket approach statewide would be really helpful.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Bivish.

Bivish GHIMIRE: Sorry, hi. We have been liaising with the scooter company one to one and having a policy in house to incorporate what are the challenges that we have. We just did a pushbike trial over here in Hobsons Bay, and we got positive feedback. We have a reporting system every month and actually record what is the community feedback and what is the operational challenge that this company would be having and how the council can contribute to that. We have been working on that and we are more looking now at the next stage of the e-scooters, so we will be looking at what challenge we will have on that one. I just wanted to give an update on that.

The CHAIR: Yes, thank you. I might just add to that question, if you can, Bivish, as well maybe, respond: what are some of the challenges that you are seeing for cyclists in your area? And should there be better infrastructure, or is there a better way that we could be protecting those vulnerable road users?

Bivish GHIMIRE: Yes, definitely there are a lot of challenges. The first thing is the green line, you know, the bike riding line for the cyclists. But also there is a challenge in the community of losing the parking on the side, which is the other challenge that we have to face side by side. Definitely it is a challenge for the vulnerable users like cyclists and pedestrians, to provide them a dedicated path. But on the other hand, we do have limited resources and space where we can just take that out. Those are the few challenges, I would say, where we are more looking into and integrating those two challenges together.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I might just open it up to the others, maybe, if they want to talk about cycling infrastructure or pedestrian infrastructure that may be needed or recommendations. Thanks, Rayna.

Rayna BERG: I can speak to the situations with some of the schools and with our active travel work that we have done with primary schools and secondary schools. Often we engage with a school and we might have some funding or an opportunity to provide some education or promote active travel within the school, and quite often the school comes back to us and says, 'Look, we think active travel is great, but we don't feel like it's something we can promote with our school because we don't feel like it's safe for our children to be riding or walking to school.' Improving safety networks for bicycles and for walking around schools, particularly in some of our newer growth areas, is really important for us, and approaching active travel campaigns with a safety lens is also really important.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Martin.

Martin HALDEN: Yes, probably just add to the cyclist discussion again. The fatalities that we have had in Greater Dandenong that have been cyclist ones have not necessarily been the family or child on the bike, they have been the sort of lycra-clad commuter on arterial roads again, where potentially you have got less expectation or less acceptance from the other drivers about cyclists being there, or they should be off the road on paths but obviously they are travelling at far too great a speed to be suitably on the paths. Unfortunately, Greater Dandenong was on the news about six months ago with a car-versus-cyclist road rage incident where a car swerved into the cyclist. I guess a lot of those visual cues within some of our higher speed roads around cycle lanes and cyclist use are probably things we would say are falling under the radar again. Obviously separation is nice, but it is not feasible for your lycra-clad commuter that is going at pretty high speeds on a bike.

The CHAIR: Yes. Thank you, Martin. I am sorry that we will have to wrap the session up now; I am just mindful of time. I really want to say thank you for all of your contributions today and for answering our questions and your submissions, and just to repeat that if there is anything further that you would like the Committee to consider or would like to add, please do not hesitate to write to us. Thank you again for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.