

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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

Shepparton—Wednesday 13 September 2023

MEMBERS

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Anthony Cianflone

Wayne Farnham

John Mullahy

Dylan Wight

Jess Wilson

WITNESSES

Sylvia Campbell, and

Colin Dowley.

The CHAIR: Welcome to this forum for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. Thank you for your participation today.

We want to run this session fairly informally, so it will just be like a chat today. Today's forum, though, is being recorded by Hansard. While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside of the hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

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Can I please remind everyone: have your mobile phone turned to silent.

I might introduce ourselves on the Committee, and then we will come to you. I am Alison, the Chair. I am the Member for Bellarine.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Kim O'Keeffe, your local Member, for Shepparton. Welcome. Lovely to see you both.

Colin DOWLEY: We know Kim's face, yes.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Lovely. That is pleasing.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: For quite a while.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Lovely to see you. Thank you for coming.

John MULLAHY: John Mullahy, Member for Glen Waverley.

Dylan WIGHT: Dylan Wight, Member for Tarneit.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Anthony Cianflone, Member for Pascoe Vale.

Jess WILSON: Jess Wilson, Member for Kew.

Colin DOWLEY: Nice to meet you all.

The CHAIR: Thank you for your time today.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: That is all right.

The CHAIR: We have had a couple of hearings in Melbourne and a couple of online hearings, and we are hearing from a whole range of experts. Today was a really good chance to have some local regional knowledge and a conversation, so we appreciate your time. What we thought we might do is just have a chat, and then we might ask you questions. If you could tell us a little bit about yourself—maybe how long you have lived here and maybe your mode of transport or how you get around—maybe that can help us start.

Colin DOWLEY: You go first, Sylvia.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I was born here in Shepp.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Yay, we love that.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: So I have been here for quite a while. I drive a car, so that is my way of getting around.

The CHAIR: Okay, and do you live close to the town or do you live a little bit out of the town?

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I live on Balaclava Road, which is an arterial road. It is a government road, which is good, because it gets fixed.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thanks, Sylvia.

Colin DOWLEY: I have been in Shepp all my life. I am living in Hawdon Street now, opposite the superschool. The road is a disgrace. It has been repaired, patched, repaired—poorly. I know the other speakers said potholes, and it is just so bad. Our insurance and rego are all going up, but the quality of our roads is going down. I do a fair lot of day drives, and if you are going somewhere, you are concentrating so much on avoiding potholes that you are not concentrating on what is really going on around you. But we all know about the potholes.

The CHAIR: Is the car your main transport?

Colin DOWLEY: Yes, just the car. What else would you like to know?

The CHAIR: What we might do is ask you a few questions, and then it just gives you a chance to share your thoughts and experiences. We might ask Kim. We will just go around.

Kim O'KEEFFE: That is great. Thank you for coming. We have had a really good morning getting some feedback. This is what we are all here for, so it is really great to hear some locals and your experiences. It is great to hear that you are both still driving and experiencing the things that we want to hear about. Have you noticed any change in driver behaviour, particularly post COVID? We know that people stopped driving for quite some time or some people lost confidence during that time. How do you feel about what has happened?

Colin DOWLEY: There are quite a few things that I have noticed. Stop signs, nobody cares—straight through. I have got a list of things here.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Yes, bring your list out. That is good.

Colin DOWLEY: I have done a fair bit of research here. The other thing: if you are going somewhere, like quite often I go to Nagambie to buy a pork and gravy roll, which is beautiful, if you are sitting on 110, you are holding the traffic up. They just zoom around you. Tailgating—another problem. Whether this has happened since COVID or not, it seems to be more prevalent now. Indicators are optional: 'Oh, yeah, you are turning. Thank you.' The other thing that really bugs me is people driving with fog lights on at night when there is no fog. I thought that was against the law, but apparently not anymore.

Kim O'KEEFFE: So do you think that has escalated?

Colin DOWLEY: I think so. I think the problem is all these modern vehicles now have fog lights, where back in my day fog lights were a very optional extra—and orange and yellow and useless. Now they have got good fog lights, but they are distracting—they are bright.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Do you think people have gone off the road rules a bit more?

Colin DOWLEY: I think so. Without a doubt.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Perhaps just as they have come back, their thoughts are a bit different. What about you, Sylvia? Do you have something to add to that?

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I came through the town this morning and I was sitting on 40, and a lady in a four-wheel just went past me like I was stopped. They do not worry about the limits in the town.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Concentration, yes.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: Yes. She must have been doing nearly 60 going through the town—did not ease. I thought, 'Not much good putting it down to 40 if they won't do it.' I am a great one for driving on my cruise control, because I go across to Mooropna quite a lot and you get picked up over there very quickly if you go a little bit too fast. I did have a thing on last Saturday—I was going over to my daughter's—and at the double turn there at Fryers Street there was a little lady, and I know who it was. She was in a little Suzuki. She was in the left-hand lane going around the corner, and next minute she was over onto the right-hand side. She did not have a clue what to do to go around that double corner. The chap that was in the car in front of me had to brake to let her in. And then the next minute she was back on the other side. So she really did not know. And she is an older lady—says me.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Thank you for that. We are hearing a bit of that too. When people have had the break from driving and then start driving again, they might have forgotten some of those road rules.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: Yes.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Thank you for that.

The CHAIR: Anthony.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thanks for appearing.

Colin DOWLEY: No worries.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Look, I am keen to hear a bit more about, just generally building on everything you have already sort of mentioned, your general experience of driving as an older driver now. What can the Victorian Government do better? What can this Committee look at specifically to make the experience of driving as a mature driver safer? And how can we help educate other drivers on the road and other road users about mature drivers on our roads?

Colin DOWLEY: We should have a 'P' for pensioner perhaps on our cars so they will avoid us. No, I do not know whether we can do much more apart from the roads. That is the main concern I think for everybody—the roads and the quality of the roads. And that causes you to take your eyes off the road to avoid a pothole, and you do not know what is going to happen.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I avoid Colin's road. I travel from Balaclava Road down to the cannery, but I do not go back the other way. It was a good road until—they did it all up; next fortnight they went along and dug it all up again to put pipes in. And if they would just get it all ready to go together—I mean, they spend all that money to have it done, and about a fortnight or a month later, they are putting in pipes because they had to do it. So I do not know why they cannot do it before they reseal the road. So you go along, and you have got sections out everywhere along it. So I avoid in front of Colin's place when I am going home from that way, which is a couple of times a week.

Anthony CIANFLONE: You were talking about things like tailgating. You think that has gotten a lot worse.

Colin DOWLEY: Yes.

Anthony CIANFLONE: And people not indicating—

Colin DOWLEY: Indicating is a terrible thing. You are driving along, and you try and judge what they are going to do. They sort of slow down, and oh, no, no, they keep going. But that is, I find, very annoying, because if you do not know what they are doing or if they do not know what they are doing, then how do we know what they are doing?

Anthony CIANFLONE: Yes, that is right.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I think the indication is a big thing here in the town too. A lot of people do not indicate. You think, 'Oh, they're going straight through,' and next minute they make a quick right turn.

Colin DOWLEY: Yes.

The CHAIR: So just maybe on that, maybe I can ask about re-education. Is there something that you think could happen?

Colin DOWLEY: Well, apart from getting them to go and re-sit training, I do not know whether—

Sylvia CAMPBELL: You be quiet!

Colin DOWLEY: Nobody is going to put their hand up for that. We all know we are all good drivers. I think the P-platers are the better drivers because they seem to go quicker.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: Maybe.

Colin DOWLEY: I was young once too, so I know what it is all like. But it is hard to get re-education on things like—it is just common courtesy to put your indicator on if you are going around a corner. I do not know what you can do apart from perhaps having some police every now and then booking somebody, and for going through a stop sign—again, just straight through. So if the police can book a few people and then that gets around and then people will say, ‘Oh, crikey, I’ve got to put my indicator on’ or ‘I’ve got to stop at this stop sign—at least slow right down’, then that might help. But police are obviously under the pump with everything else, so it is a bit hard for them to do that sort of thing.

The CHAIR: John, we might go to you, if you like.

John MULLAHY: Yes. What would you like drivers to know or think about when they share the road with mature pedestrians or older pedestrians?

Colin DOWLEY: Older pedestrians?

John MULLAHY: Yes.

Colin DOWLEY: I have not had much problem with pedestrians as such, even young ones or old ones.

John MULLAHY: As you are walking around the town you do not have any issues with the P-platers ripping around corners or things like that?

Colin DOWLEY: No, no. I nearly always go across the crossings, but even doing that you can take your life in your own hands at times if they want to run through a red light. But again, they have obviously got to get somewhere pretty quick to do those sorts of things, or they are just forgetful, yes.

John MULLAHY: I was at a crossing last night crossing the road, and the guy was looking out the other side, out the window. He was not even looking at the crossing, so you would have to be fully aware, wouldn’t you?

Colin DOWLEY: You do. You have got to be aware of where you are at and where the cars are.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: Who is around you.

Colin DOWLEY: If they are slowing down. But they are pretty good, the crossings now.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: We have got a lot now in Shepp.

Colin DOWLEY: Yes, they are pretty good.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: It was a bit of a pain when they went in, but you soon get used to them.

The CHAIR: Jess.

Jess WILSON: Thank you so much, Colin and Sylvia. It has been a really, really interesting discussion. I do not know if this is something that you use or you would like to use, but we have spoken a lot about the use of public transport throughout these public hearings, and obviously in Regional Victoria it is different to in Melbourne and particularly in inner Melbourne, which a number of us represent. If there was greater access to public transport, would you look at using it here? Do you use it now? Do you use the bus network? I would be interested to get your perspective on shifting to public transport—or are you pretty used to driving at this point?

Sylvia CAMPBELL: No, I probably would not.

Colin DOWLEY: I have not used public transport around town, like the buses. Like Sylvia, I do not think I would, unless you can get to where you want to go. But no, I do not use it or have any plans to use public transport while I can still drive.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: Lots of times it is only on the hour, and if you have missed it you have got to wait another hour. If you have got appointments, it just makes it a little bit hard.

Jess WILSON: Maybe we could think about a tram network in Shepparton.

Colin DOWLEY: No, no, no.

Kim O'KEEFFE: I am actually covering it with the transport minister at the moment in regard to a bus review in our town, because we do have a shortfall of offerings.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I think the last time I went on the coaches in Shepp was when we had seniors week. I got on one coach and got off that and got onto the next one, and I saw parts of Shepparton I have never seen before. It was good. I had a friend with me and we thoroughly enjoyed our day. I think we were on it for about 5 hours. We did it in the morning and went and had lunch and then we went elsewhere in the afternoon, so it was a good thing that they had. It was good, because Shepp has grown so much.

The CHAIR: Dylan, I might go to you.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you, and thank you, Colin and Sylvia, for coming along today. Thank you, Colin, for bringing your preprepared list of issues.

Colin DOWLEY: That is quite all right.

Dylan WIGHT: Generally speaking, how safe do you feel when you are using the roads, whether that be car or walking, and do you ever find yourself changing your plans or activities because you do not feel safe on the road?

Sylvia CAMPBELL: No. No, not yet.

Colin DOWLEY: No. I do avoid certain places, particularly down Welsford Street, where the double lanes go in. I find it should have had a little bit of a curve in the concrete, and I avoid that. I will come down and go straight through. But I just avoid certain places like that because I just find—like Sylvia said, I have had that before where I am on the inside lane and the person on the outside lane goes straight across to the inside lane, thinking that is what they have got to do, but they are supposed to stay in that lane. So I avoid certain places like that. I do not think it is because of my age. I just think it is because it is harder.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I hope not, because I am old enough to be his mum.

Colin DOWLEY: I doubt that, Sylvia!

Sylvia CAMPBELL: And I do not avoid the double lane, because I travel that way all the time. I suppose I have gotten used to it.

The CHAIR: I have a question about road safety messaging. Over the years we have seen lots of messaging about seatbelt wearing, drink driving and speeding, but we are seeing statistics, obviously, that messages are not getting through and people are, like you said, running red lights. They are not wearing their seatbelts now. Have you got any insight or ideas about how you think we could be better targeting our messages to our communities on safety?

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I think they either make up their mind they are going to wear them, or they are not.

Colin DOWLEY: I must say, I have not seen much seatbelt not-wearing, if that is the right technology. Most people or all people in vehicles are always wearing seatbelts, from what I have seen. Obviously you do not always look and say, 'Oh, he's not wearing a seatbelt.'

Sylvia CAMPBELL: I think the younger ones wear them more because they have been brought up with them from when they were little. My grandchildren and great-grandkids will not travel in the car if they have not got their seatbelts on.

Colin DOWLEY: I guess the other thing is people texting on their phone. You get to the 'Stop' sign and you are not moving and you think, 'They'll be texting on their phone,' because they are not concentrating on the green light. That is another thing: there has been plenty of advertising for that not to happen, but how do

you stop it, unless you book them and you have those things up there that can read? They are pretty impressive, those.

The CHAIR: Have you had them in your community?

Colin DOWLEY: Yes, we had them in Mooroopna, coming into Mooroopna, and somewhere else in Shepparton—yes, very early. But I do not know. They are just mobile, so they move them around.

The CHAIR: They are, yes.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: My mobile sits in the back seat. At the moment it sits on the kitchen bench; I forgot to pick it up.

The CHAIR: So having some education awareness and campaigns you think would be useful now?

Colin DOWLEY: Yes, particularly if you could have a campaign where obviously it is no texting or talking on the phone while you are driving, and then you could go into having to stop at ‘Stop’ signs and ‘Please use your indicator’—pretty simple things. But, like I say, it is very difficult at times trying to foresee what the person in front of you is going to do.

The CHAIR: Just one last thing that I would like to ask is about behaviours on our roads since COVID. We have had some cyclists talk about how they do not feel like they are safe or they do not feel like they are humans on the roads—they are objects on the roads. Others have felt that there is more aggression on the road now—impatience.

Colin DOWLEY: I think you are right.

The CHAIR: Do you want to just talk a little bit about your experience of that?

Colin DOWLEY: With the bike riders, sometimes they can be very annoying if they are not riding how they should be. Then we have to go over so far, where sometimes you have got to cross the white line, and other times they are riding in single file and then you can just go out a bit, a metre or whatever, and then go past. Obviously being a motorist, the cyclists I think are their own worst enemy in that respect. They will have different ideas of course—they will blame us motorists for that.

The CHAIR: I think that they did recognise that there are cyclists that do not do themselves any favours. They did recognise that. But they felt that there was an increase of sort of this negative attitude towards them.

Colin DOWLEY: Yes, I would probably agree with that. But like I say, I think most of it is brought on themselves personally. But they are quite entitled to be on the road—I do not have any problems with that—it is just how they use the road that is the problem.

The CHAIR: Have you seen, Sylvia, anything?

Sylvia CAMPBELL: No. I have not struck it very much because, I mean, basically I am a town driver. I do not go that far, maybe over to Echuca, and then my daughter drives wherever we are going after that—I just swap over and she drives. But other than going across to Mooroopna and that sort of thing, that is about as far as I go just lately, except for tomorrow it is over to Tongala.

The CHAIR: Have you experienced any aggression on the road?

Sylvia CAMPBELL: No, I have not, actually. The only thing that really annoys me is you will be driving along and doing 60, and the next minute you have got a car in front of you and they are doing 40, and I think, ‘Well, what’s going on?’ They just keeping going at 40. They just do not worry about it. They are either speeding or they are slowing down, one or the other. It is through the town that it annoys me—if they just go past you when you are doing 40 and you are doing the right thing.

The CHAIR: Kim, do you have anything further?

Kim O’KEEFFE: That is really good. It is just really interesting to hear your perspectives on things, and as locals we all know we want to make it safer for everyone, whether they are cyclists, motorcyclists, car drivers

or pedestrians. I mean, the whole idea of this is actually to get the feedback so that we can actually help contribute to that—so that all of us feel safe on the roads. I really appreciate you being here.

Sylvia CAMPBELL: That is okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Does anyone have questions—no? Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate you coming today. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.